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# ENDURANCE AND REDEMPTION

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**I** gave birth to my adopted son last year. He was born at home before dawn on a warm August morning. I carried him for 38 weeks—still, he was conceived years before his days in my womb. I delivered a baby in 2024 whose life began in the year 2003.

Mercedes Luna-Munroe was born in New York to Dominican parents. She met her first husband when she was 25. She remembers the day he walked into her parents' home. The year was 1998. A stranger on an errand, he came to pick up empanadas from her mom and left an impression behind. The stranger became her friend and then her husband in 2000. Sadly, difficulty would devour the young marriage.

Mercedes heard the dreadful word “infertile” at age 26. She was diagnosed with polycystic ovarian syndrome and was given few options beyond in vitro fertilization (IVF). She trod the costly road of conceiving children through IVF and welcomed six embryos in April 2003. Although her journey to children should have ended that year, the story had just begun.

Mercedes became pregnant with two of her six embryos—twin girls named Samantha and Lizbeth. Then the unthinkable happened at 23 weeks of gestation. Her cervix dilated prematurely, and her amniotic sac was accidentally punctured during an examination. An untimely labor ended the lives of her twins. The girls, born on August 11, 2003,

lived only a few hours. The traumatic loss of her babies is a heartbreak Mercedes continues to nurse. Her pregnancy with Samantha and Lizbeth would be her last.

Her doctor transferred two additional embryos to her with no positive pregnancy test. By 2005, Mercedes had two remaining embryos and no marriage. Her memories of this period are saturated with dark shadows. She sank into depression while working to maintain her home and preserve her two frozen embryos. When she could no longer afford to pay the storage fees, Mercedes faced two choices: destroy the tiny lives or donate them. She (and her ex-husband) chose the latter. The embryos were shipped to the National Embryo Donation Center (NEDC) in Knoxville, Tennessee. And here, my family enters the story.

I was battling secondary infertility when I learned of NEDC's embryo adoption program. My husband and I applied in early 2023 with the hope of adopting an embryo who had been waiting for a long time. Mercedes' little ones had been frozen for 20 years when we found them. Both embryos were transferred to me in December 2023. One went to be with the Lord; we named him Zion. The other was born on August 11, 2024, and we named him Kian (which means "enduring"). Kian shares a birthday with the twin sisters Mercedes delivered and lost 21 years before.

Kian's middle name is Immanuel, which means "God with us." The name appears in Isaiah 7:14. Israel was threatened by strong enemies and shook with fear like a forest shaken by winds. But God was with his people and promised to save them. His word came with a sign: A son would be born and

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named “God is with us” despite the dark circumstances. This sign, partially fulfilled in Isaiah’s time, was ultimately satisfied one starlit night in Bethlehem. A virgin conceived and bore a son—Jesus the Messiah (Matt. 1:21–23).

God’s people live in a world where traumatic heartbreaks leave us shaken. Yet our God is with us in every darkness. His presence is our light and the source of our hope. I gave birth to an adopted son named Immanuel because the greater Immanuel is a redeemer. ✨