**A Special Slice of Extra-Ordinary Time**

**(Column 87, December 5, 2022)**

By Lucia A. Silecchia

This past year, several couples near and dear to me welcomed new infants to their delighted families. Each time, I wrote a note to welcome the child, congratulate the parents, and wish the happy family much joy and love in their lives together. I always end these notes with a wish that the family enjoys this very special time in their lives as they get to know each other.

The day an infant is safely delivered from womb to world is a day of great rejoicing. It is that day when a mother who has carried a child hidden within her for nine months can, for the first time, gaze into his or her eyes. It is that day when a father can hold his child in his protective embrace for the very first time. It is that birthday that will have pride of place on the family’s calendar for years to come.

Yet ... the days that follow the date of birth are special too. Those are days that I truly hope that new parents will savor and enjoy. The day their child first comes home is a cherished milestone. The day their child first falls asleep in a lovingly prepared crib, or smiles for the first time, or grips a parent’s finger, or makes a sibling smile are all special days. The day the child meets eager grandparents or doting aunts and uncles and the day the child is Baptized are all also special times in that earliest season of life.

So it is that I hope the new parents I love will cherish not just the child’s birthday but all those special days that soon follow.

This is on my mind as I think ahead toward Christmas and our joyous celebration of the birth of a child. The joy that wraps December 25th is filled with that blessed hope of a long-awaited birthday.

Alas, all too quickly, December 26th dawns.

As a young child I thought this was among the saddest days of the year. Today, still, I am dismayed to see Christmas trees unceremoniously thrust out on the curb a mere day or two post-Christmas. Today, still, I am annoyed when the Christmas music that has been on the radio non-stop since Halloween is taken off the air on December 26th – just as the Christmas season is beginning, not ending.

Perhaps this year, my perennial wish that families enjoy the special season when they are getting to know their beloved newborn child is advice I should take myself.

Maybe it is the time of year to take time, after the birthday enthusiasm of Christmas day, to take some quiet time to get to know the Christ child better.

Maybe it is the time to contemplate His birth with that wonder that families have when they gaze on a new infant in the early season of their child’s life.

Maybe it is the time to think of the day after Christmas as the start of a season of special days – and not the end. The Feast of the Holy Family, the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, the Feast of the Epiphany, and the celebration of the Baptism of Christ, to name but a few, are all special celebrations after Christmas. They are opportunities to slow down and recall with continued joy those early days of Christ’s life on earth.

All appearances to the contrary, perhaps those like me who drag our heels in taking down the last vestiges of Christmas decorations are not merely lazy. We may simply be waiting to celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord (“Candlemas”) – a holiday that does not come until a full forty days after Christmas!

As I look ahead toward Christmas, I hope that this year I will do what my younger self could not do and see the deep joy in the special days that follow Christmas – those days that are truly the Christmas season. I hope that you might join me and, with the unique wonder that greets a new child, enjoy this special slice of an extra-ordinary time.

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