

by Kathleen Basi

Beyond the burning bush: God speaks to us, loud and clear

Sometimes God appears in a burning bush. And sometimes in a family planning method. But I've learned that when God speaks, you'd better pay attention, because God's lessons are never a one-and-done deal. You always need them again somewhere down the road.

My husband, Christian, and I learned NFP just before we got married. My cycles were long and ambiguous, and one of our first marital challenges was trying to develop a healthy relationship of physical intimacy when we had to abstain for three and four weeks at a time. We tried everything Marilyn Shannon recommends in *Fertility, Cycles and Nutrition*, but we saw little improvement. So we learned self-denial. We learned that we can rage and shake our fists at God all we like, but He is still the master of our fertility. And we stuck with it — not al-

ways perfectly, but with ever-increasing submission to God's will.

Practicing NFP changed us. NFP pulled us away from the world, with its focus on material things. Even our closest friends regarded us with amused tolerance, and we didn't understand how they could spend so much money and accumulate so much "stuff." We were saving like crazy so we could start our family. By contrast, they seemed determined to put off having kids as long as possible. My sister called us "super-Catholics."

Shortly after 9/11, we started trying to conceive. For the first two or three cycles, we took our failure in stride. By the sixth, I was frantic.

Our journey through infertility lasted three years. That long walk uncovered within us a tremendous capacity for pain. If only we could have remained

blissfully ignorant! Every day something else twisted the knife in the wound. We looked around and saw people who seemed to regard their children as an inconvenience, people who used the need for more stuff as an excuse to limit their family, and women who complained about the discomfort of pregnancy. One person even told us we didn't understand what Christmas was really about because we didn't have kids.

We raged at God. It was so unfair! Teenagers, single women and couples who admitted bluntly that they didn't want children all got pregnant while we begged God, night after night and month after month, to give us a child instead. He kept saying "no." At last, we got through the raging and were able, if not to accept, at least to submit to God's will.

On the far side of infertility, life looked a lot different. Being open to God's will was no longer a catch phrase. We knew exactly what it meant. For us, it meant a different route to parenthood: adoption. Or so we thought. We were mere weeks away from traveling to Russia to meet our new family when my luteal phase reached 16 days — and then 17 — and a pregnancy test came back positive.

The next three years were the best of my life. I had it all: a great husband, a beautiful baby boy, perfect in every way. I was complacent and self-centered in my happiness. We conceived again without difficulty when Alex was just over a year old. I knew then that we were all set. We

The Basi family: writer Kathleen, Julianna, Alex and Christian.



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red-carpet looks, the proliferation of wedding-themed reality TV — they bear great cumulative force. They can become dangerous distractions from what really matters: the relationship that begins when couples say “I do.”

I find great comfort knowing that we are steeping this life-altering act in the church. Wedding frills and fuss mean nothing compared with the special grace conferred in the sacrament of marriage.

Ted and I are working on both checklists now. Insuring my ring was easy. Insuring our marriage? That’s going to take some work. ■

Christina Capecchi, the assistant managing editor of Family Foundations, will regularly chronicle her engagement experiences.

had survived our time of trial, and now we were receiving our just reward.

The day Julianna was born, two words shattered all my illusions: “chromosomal abnormality.” That morning, I came face to face with the ugliness of my own selfishness and prejudice. I had to admit to a lifelong terror of and revulsion for the disabled — from children, to high school classmates, to the man who carries a candle for Stations of the Cross every Friday during Lent.

It was the worst day of my life — and the best, because, although it didn’t feel like it at the time, I was ready. God had spent eight years preparing me and my husband for this moment, planting the seeds of self-denial, of openness to, and acceptance of, His will. Initial rejection — an inevitable part of the grieving process — lasted a day for me, two for Christian.

Julianna is the best thing that could have happened to me. Once again, God is using our fertility to draw us away from

worldly desires. Because of her, I am learning to die to self. I have to give up a lot of “me” time to make sure Julianna gets the therapies she needs, and medical co-pays eat into what luxuries we allow ourselves.

I am no more perfect a person than I was when we were first married and struggling with abstinence. I get angry and resentful; often I feel overwhelmed. I know God doesn’t give us more than we can handle, but, like Ziggy, sometimes I wish He didn’t have so much faith in me. And yet never a day goes by when I don’t lay Julianna in her crib for nap and thank God for both my children — exactly as they are.

I would like to believe that all our struggles are over now — that we have learned what we were supposed to learn. But I expect that God has plenty more to teach us about self-sacrifice and openness to His will. He may not be speaking out of a burning bush, but He is speaking all the same. ■

Kathleen Basi and her husband Christian, live in Columbia, Mo.