

Devotion – Day 6 – Blessed from the Beginning – Life Week 2023

Bible readings: Isaiah 43:1-2, Jeremiah 31:13, Matthew 11:28

If you're a connoisseur of movies, you've seen more than one surprise party played out on film. The scene inevitably goes something like this:

The guests arrive at the party with flawless accuracy and find the perfect hiding place in a picture-perfect room. The lights dim; all is quiet. With impeccable timing, the unsuspecting honoree arrives, and the entire party jumps out, simultaneously yelling, "Surprise!" The guest of honor doesn't let out a scream, wet her pants, or fall over clutching his chest; he or she is simply and utterly thrilled by both the surprise and the impromptu gathering in his or her honor.

Unfortunately, real life isn't like the movies.

In real life, surprises don't always bring us perfect joy. In fact, sometimes surprises usher in hardship or financial strain: *Surprise! Someone rear ended your car in the school parking lot. Surprise! Your position is being rified.*

And sometimes surprises beget sadness and suffering: *Surprise! Your best friend is moving out of state. Surprise! You have cancer.*

In a world filled with sin, some surprises are difficult to bear.

Let's be honest, today's Life Week 2023 topics can certainly fall into the "difficult to bear" category. Surprise pregnancies and adverse prenatal diagnoses aren't usually met with shouts of joy. Instead, they're often met with fear, tears, questions, and sorrow.

But our surprising God meets the difficult things in life with a message of hope: **"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; / I have called you by name, you are mine. / When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; / and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; / when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, / and the flame shall not consume you"** (Isaiah 43:1-2).

Our surprising God not only walks with us, but He also bears the weight of sin and sorrow, the fears and questions of tomorrow, on His shoulders: **"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"** (Matthew 11:28).

And here's another wonderful surprise: God works through hard things for our good, often transforming them into gifts of joy: **"I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow"** (Jeremiah 31:13).

We are blessed For Life, and that blessing was established at the very beginning. Created, redeemed, and called, every life has value, meaning, and purpose. Planned or unplanned, adverse prenatal diagnosis or not, every life is a gift from God. May every part of life—even the surprises we weren't hoping for—becomes blessings in our lives and in the lives of those God loves.

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Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Please be with us as we face the surprises of life. Comfort, reassure, and uphold us through Your Word, Your Sacraments, and Your people. Transform that which is difficult to bear into blessings meant for our good. All this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.