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## *Two Heartbeats: When Death and Birth Share a Season*

**An article for the *Cathedral Times***

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*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die...* Ecclesiastes 3:1–2a

I had heard this verse countless times, but I had never felt it the way I did this year, when both birth and death arrived in the same season of my life. I had read books and taken classes on processing grief, or on welcoming joy, but no one had taught me how to do both at once. How to hear two heartbeats: one quietly slipping away, the other arriving with the loudest cry. That was exactly what happened to me.

Earlier this year, my mother became ill, not gravely, just enough to keep an eye on. Then, in the early morning hours of Thursday, February 13, I woke up with the urge to drink water. I checked my phone and saw dozens of missed calls. My mother had passed away on her way to the hospital, praying for her children and grandchildren, singing Psalm 139 in Punjabi.

The first few mornings were the hardest waking up to a world that kept turning, even as mine had changed forever. At the time, my wife Mari was 37 weeks pregnant with our first child.

At winter's end, I lost my mother. At spring's beginning, I became a father. But between mid-February and mid-March, I felt like I was living in Holy Saturday: suspended between sorrow and hope.

After we returned from my mother's memorial service at the Cathedral—where the holy community had gathered in love—our living room was full of memorial flowers and baby shower gifts. Tiny onesies hung beside condolence cards. I couldn't tell which tears belonged to which moment. For weeks, our mailbox delivered both sympathy and congratulations.

The contrast was almost unbearable. As one life slipped through my fingers, another was placed into my arms. I was grieving and rejoicing, aching and overflowing. I thought I had to choose; either mourn fully or celebrate properly but I couldn't. Not in the way I expected.

Two months after my mother's death, and a month after my son's birth, we celebrated Easter. Somewhere in that sacred season, I realized: this is the threshold. This is the crossroad of life and death. And it is holy, the impossible hope of resurrection alongside the deep pain of what has been lost.

That's where I find myself: holding the beauty of a new beginning, and yet deeply aware of who is still absent. And I don't think God asks us to choose between the two. Somehow, both are true. Somehow, both are holy.

A few days after my mother's death, my dear friend Dr. Greg Ellison came by with one of my favorite meals—lamb chops. In our conversation during dinner, he held up his index finger and thumb pressed together and said, "joy and sadness coexist like this together—you can experience joy and sadness at the same time." I thought of this image of thumb and index finger together for days. It's okay to be sad and joyful at the same time even when you are experiencing great loss and anticipating the best thing in your life. Even now, I sometimes press those two fingers together. I talk to both my mother and my son. I share memories of her with him and tell her how her grandson is doing.

To say the least, if you find yourself this summer in that in-between place—between birth and death, joy and sorrow—know this: your heart can hold many things at once, and God meets us tenderly in all of them. Whether the nurse is waking you up to check your vitals, or you're unwrapping yet another soft blanket for your newborn (which we absolutely love, by the way), know you're not alone. If you're sipping soup brought by a

kind colleague while grieving someone you love or holding a tiny new life in your arms while the weight of loss lingers, or if you're laughing while mourning or crying in the middle of joy, know that these moments can coexist. Like a thumb and an index finger.

This crossroad I'm standing on isn't just a season of transition. It's where the Christian life is most honestly lived: between the grief of what's gone and the grace of what's been given. Between loss and light. Between the tomb and the garden.

I understand now: I wasn't meant to choose between mourning and rejoicing. I was being invited to stand at the threshold and to feel the presence of both.

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