

THE GREATEST MIRACLE

On a bright September day our youngest daughter, Erica, was in a serious car accident. She was flown to the hospital, and after hours of emergency surgery, we received the terrible news: our beautiful, vivacious, 17-year-old daughter had died.

The next few months were agony for us. We endured her birthday and Thanksgiving and braced ourselves for our first Christmas without her. People warned us that the holidays would be difficult, but no amount of warning could have prepared us.

Besides feeling overwhelming sorrow and despair, I was jealous of other families who were together and happily celebrating. I bitterly wondered, “Why us? Why weren’t we granted a miracle like the ones others speak about?”

Amid my despair, I remembered a time that our ward held an activity called “Christmas in Bethlehem.” Ward members came dressed up as if they were living at the time Jesus was born. Erica, who was four years old at the time, wore a hand-me-down long, white dress and a scarf wrapped around her head. The culmination of the evening was a reenactment of the Nativity in a mock stable decorated with bales of hay and a manger. A young couple with their newborn played the parts of Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus.

As we gathered around the nativity, I noticed

that Erica was missing from my side. I panicked until I caught a flash of her white dress near the nativity. Then my panic shifted from fear for her welfare to fear that she would disrupt the scene. I was about to call out to her, but I paused and watched as she made her way to the manger.

Erica quietly knelt next to Mary and looked up at her as if to get her permission. Then Erica reached out and tenderly caressed the sleeping baby. I was not the only one who noticed. Others soon quieted and watched as she knelt close to the baby. A tender feeling permeated the group as they realized that this baby was the Christ child for Erica.

In my grief, this Christmas memory brought feelings of peace and comfort as I recalled my young daughter’s devotion. My mind

had been full of questions about life and death—questions that didn’t seem to matter as much before Erica’s death. As I pondered the Resurrection and the Crucifixion, I identified with Mary. She loved her newborn Son, and she later endured terrible pain and anguish as she witnessed His suffering and death. Christ was not spared the cross, and Mary was not spared her grief.

At Christmas we celebrate the beginning of the Savior’s life on earth, but for me, His birth will now always be wrapped up with His suffering, death, and Resurrection—the Atonement. Because the Savior broke the bands of death, I know that Erica’s death will not be final. That is the miracle to be thankful for—the greatest miracle of all time. ■

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