

THE CHALLENGE OF MISCARRIAGE: Questions, reflections, and healing on the loss of a child

by Kristine L.

You probably didn't even notice. I never had the chance to tell you. I had just entered my second trimester and was anxious to tell you the news that we were expecting another baby. Instead, the very same week, we found out that our little one had passed away. What next? What is an Orthodox mother to do after a miscarriage? What would happen to my baby? Could anyone tell me?

It seems nobody really knows what to say about miscarriages. Some seemed to have only little bits of information and advice on this tricky subject. That's most unfortunate, because to me, it didn't matter that our baby had never actually been born. My husband and I had still experienced the death of a child. If we are truly a pro-life community that recognizes life beginning at conception, then we the Church must be ready and willing to acknowledge and assist those women who have lost their babies, no matter what stage of life their baby reached. Even though our baby was only about the size of a lime, Robert and I decided he needed a burial. We returned our precious little baby to the earth and planted a white crepe myrtle in memory.

Did you ever worry or wonder what happens to a little unborn baby that perishes? Does the baby need to be baptized like we do to join body of Christ? St. Gregory of Nyssa tells us that a baby has a pure soul: "Whereas the innocent babe has no such plague before its soul's eyes obscuring its measure of light, it continues to exist in that natural life; it does not need the soundness that comes from purgation, because it never admitted the plague into its soul at all." What a comfort it was to know that because my little baby never had the chance to be corrupted by sin, he was immediately transformed into a glorious new form in the Kingdom of God in a way we cannot even understand or imagine. He will not have to endure trial or Judgment like the rest of us. What a privilege to have carried that little baby while on earth, even for a short time! This is why Fr. David said it was only appropriate to sing "Christ is Risen" or "Holy God" at the time, since this baby had no sins to forgive. Hence that white colored crepe myrtle will always be a perfect reminder of this purity.

Traditionally baby is supposed to receive a name on the 8th day after birth. However, if this baby really is an angel now as St. Gregory tells us, then is it not okay to have a name to call upon to pray for us while we remain here on earth? Although this baby was perfectly formed (10 fingers & 10 toes, eyes, ears, mouth, nose, even a teeny little bottom) we were unable to tell the gender for sure. But the moment we got our horrible news we decided this child needed a name, and that name would be Sava. My due date was near St. Sava's feast day. St. Sava was the first archbishop of Serbia and he is very important to Serbs. I have a great-great grandmother too that was named Sava, after the Sava River. In Bosnia, where she was born, it was a trend long ago to name girls after rivers. Naming your baby is one of the best ways to honor that child as well as help you accept that he or she was a real person.

The next time you hear that someone has miscarried, remember to act the same as you would with any other death in the family. Drop off a meal, send a card, light a candle, ask the parents how they are doing (don't forget, the fathers are mourning the loss too, not just the mothers) and most importantly remember to pray for them to find peace and comfort.

Here are two helpful websites for Orthodox women suffering from miscarriages.

Lost Innocents: Practical help for miscarriage from an Orthodox Christian perspective
<http://lostinnocentsorthodox.blogspot.com>

Also there is another site similar to the one above that is Romanian:
<http://prunciplierdutisinascutiinaintedevreme.wordpress.com>

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