Tuesday morning, Eva, our three-year old proudly announced to anyone who would listen, “Isaac has a birthday today and he finally is a number. And his number is...ONE!”

I’ve said this with every child of ours, but I super duper mean it this time: I cannot believe how quickly a baby’s first year flies by. It’s crazy! This past weekend, I spent a little bit of time reflecting on what a great little dude Isaac is: happy, gentle, cuddly, funny, and, he also just so happens to be incredibly gifted in the hand-waving-while-walking department (his newest trick). In short, he is such a gift. It goes without saying that I think all of my children are pretty awesome, but Isaac is a little bit different. It isn’t that I love him more than my other kids, or anything like that. But his mere existence is a daily reminder of God’s intimate love for Jon, me, and our family.

I know I’ve shared that, after six pregnancies and six healthy children, Jon and I conceived two babies that we never got to meet: Max and Gemma. They are two precious souls that we talk about with our kids every single day, and we all pray we get to see Max and Gemma’s sweet faces after our earthly life ends. Losing them was really hard for Jon and me. It was a time when we had to coach ourselves through lots prayer. Somehow, we just knew that despite the deep grief we were feeling, coupled with the overwhelming feelings of loneliness and brokenness that kept taunting us, that God was still there holding us. Even when we didn’t it didn’t seem like it. Jon and I consciously put our pain at the foot of the cross, sometimes better than others, asking God to take away the hurt. And for what seemed like a long time, He didn’t take away the pain. He let us feel the ache, the pain, the loss. In hindsight I can see that God wanted us to choose to accept God’s plan as perfect and beautiful, even though it didn’t feel like either at all.

Surprisingly, the pain did subside eventually. Even more shockingly, as time passed, Jon and I realized God was asking us to open ourselves up to having another baby. That meant the potential of another loss, and all of the hurts that come with it. We were a little scared, but we knew we were called to try, even if it meant not being able to hold another baby we partnered with God in creating.

Cautiously delighted, we discovered I was pregnant in early September 2016. We both “knew” the baby was a girl and that we should name her Rose. LaRosa is my mother’s maiden name, and we both thought Rose was a nice little wink and a nod to her, as well as beautiful name for a rainbow baby, a baby born after miscarriage. But there were other reasons Rose seemed like such a great fit. First, the Dominican Sisters of Mary Mother of the Eucharist Saint Rose Guild had been praying for us for this particular intention, on St. Rose’s feast day. Another reason the name Rose seemed like a great choice was, shortly after we found out I was pregnant, a dear priest friend of ours informed us that after our family visited his new church, a sweet little lady noticed us. She asked him who we were and to let us know that our family reminded us of her own. She told him to tell us that Rosie was praying for us. Obviously, Rose was the perfect name, right? Ha!

Imagine our surprise when we found out at The Big Ultrasound that our baby "Rose" was a boy! I was pretty disappointed. It wasn’t because our baby was a boy and not a girl. I love my boys dearly. I simply felt confused by all of the signs I thought I saw indicating who this baby was, and it turned out not to be who he was at all. To add to the frustration, after our two losses, for some reason our next baby’s name seemed so much more significant. We wanted it to have special meaning and no boy name jumped out to us as bearing any real significance. So, we went back to the drawing board with the name search, and Jon and I prayed deliberately for God to help us to name this precious gift.
I spent weeks rifling through baby name books, and consulting baby name calculators on the internet (yes, that’s a thing). One day, I ran across the biography of St. Isaac Jogues. He was a French missionary and martyr that evangelized natives in North America. I was really moved by his dedication to the Church. I considered the prospect of naming the baby Isaac. I liked it ok, but like all of the other names I’d tossed around, it felt a little... uninspired. Later that evening I suggested the name Isaac to Jon, whose least favorite pass time in the whole wide world is coming up with baby names. He liked it. I still wasn’t sold, but we tentatively agreed.

The next morning while eating breakfast, I was talking to my second-grader, Charlie. I mentioned that Jon and I were tossing around the name Isaac. Charlie grinned a huge grin and said, “I love that name! Isaac means laughter, because Abraham and Sarah laughed when they found out they were pregnant after they were sure they couldn’t have a baby!”

Suddenly Isaac sounded a wee bit more “inspired” than it did before. I was diggin’ it.

The next challenge was the middle name. Again, we wanted it to have some oomph, but wanted it to sound good with Isaac too. Between my own four boys’ first and middles names, and the names of my nephews, I was pretty sure all of the good names were spoken for. I am a bit of a planner and not having this baby’s name figured out was driving me BANANAS! Then, at Mass one day the priest was referring to St. Francis Xavier on his feast day. He was a super stud missionary, and co-founder to the Jesuit order. I considered that as a middle name. Isaac Xavier. It wasn’t awful. I mentioned it to Jon and he loved it. I liked it enough, but again, it felt a little uninspired.

The next morning, while getting ready for the day, Jon asked me if I still liked the name Isaac Xavier. I said it was fine, but I wasn’t sold. He smiled and said, “Well, I just realized, that if we did name him Isaac Xavier, his initials would be IX Woodsum, as in Roman numeral nine (IX) Woodsum, and he is our ninth baby. I think that is a pretty cool shout-out to who he is. People will see us and think he is our seventh kid, but his name says he is our ninth.”

I stopped in my tracks. Isaac Xavier was the absolute perfect name. Done!

The day Isaac was born was a beautiful day. I realized I was in labor around 6:30 in the morning. Jon executed our plan for Isaac’s birth day and shuttled the shorties to their predetermined caregiver’s home. Jon and I spent the day taking walks, talking, grabbed a cup of coffee, went to Adoration while I labored through contractions that slowly grew more intense. It was a beautiful day. Finally, about twelve hours later, I gave birth to our beloved little IX Woodsum. The next morning, I was staring at my littlest love, thinking about how good God is. None of this was a surprise to Him. When I was crying all of those tears, steeped in hurt, He knew I be standing there at the hospital, holding my precious little rainbow baby. God was there when I was grieving with the losses of Max and Gemma. If I hadn’t lost them, I wouldn’t have Isaac.

It always shocks me how I continue to put God in a box. I thought of a billion different ways God could “show up” for me. I could get pregnant on a significant day; or, the baby could be a certain gender. Heck, I even thought that God should make me pregnant with twins (so grateful He didn’t go that route)! But He didn’t show me He was with me in any grand or dramatic way. But He showed me in a deeply intimate and precise way, that He knew I would notice. You see, Isaac was born at 6:12 (add 6+1+2), and weighed in at 8 pounds, 1 ounce (8+1). No one could have possibly have manipulated those facts. It might seem subtle to some, but to me, it was as if God had sent me a hand-written note, saying, “I was there the whole time. I love you.” And just looking at Isaac reminds me of that moment.

I don’t mean to suggest that God ties everything up in a nice pretty bow, and everyone always lives happily ever after. That isn’t it at all. We live in a messy world. It’s full of hurts, physical
and emotional. No one escapes this world without scars. But we weren’t made for this world. We were made for something better: Heaven. So, when we endure the inevitable pains that life in this broken world brings, we have to keep looking to God to carry us through it. He will. We just have to trust Him enough to let Him do it.