

—Kristin Swick-Wong, author of *Carried Safely Home: The Spiritual Legacy of an Adoptive Family*, lives in Ann Arbor, Mich., with her husband and four children

learned a 4-A way to stare down adoption anxiety: Acknowledge what is different. Sometimes we adoptive parents want our families to look like all other families. The truth is that we have unique challenges. Our children come to us having experienced significant loss. Their identities are more complex than those of our birth children. By choosing to adopt, we give up some control and open ourselves to risks that birth parents may not experience—but admitting the differences can quiet our fear and push us toward productive times of putting our faith in God. We learn that some of life's richest blessings come after discomfort and pain, and that some of those differences are just the wrappers on packages of unique, priceless joys.

Affirm what is the same. Adoptive parents are . . . parents. We marvel at each child's unique temperament, personality, and gifts. So do birth parents. We agonize about how best

to rear our children. So do birth parents. We celebrate birthdays, help with homework, cheer at soccer games, wipe noses, and drive to the emergency room in the middle of the night. We laugh and cry with our children, sharing in the highs and lows. My children and I spend our days together; my manifold activities and interactions do not look any different with those children who came by birth and those who came by adoption. No qualifying adjectives are needed: They are my children and I am their mother, and God has love and wisdom enough for all of us.

Accept help. Adoption is a pilgrimage best not undertaken alone. In the ups and downs of bringing our sons home, and since they have been with us, our relationships with committed friends have been a lifeline. When we are anxious and confused, when our faith falters, our church family stands with us, encouraging us, crying with us, praying for us, helping us hang on through adoption's tumultuous bumps. Our sons came home, not only to a new family, but also to a church community ready to love them. And those around us who have shared in our sorrow

also participate in our joy; our closest friends have experienced nearly as much joy through our adoptions as we have. When churches intentionally support adoption and foster care, multiplied blessings pour out to the children, their families, and the whole community.

Anticipate wonders. We can miss the beauty arching over our adoptions when we are muted in paperwork, waiting, uncertainty, and anxiety. Through adoption, we glimpse how God loves turning brokenness to beauty, and we understand more the longing for relationship and redemption that is at the core of our human identity. As we set our love on someone biologically unrelated to us, we marvel at God's unconditional love. As we grieve over the sad stories that sometimes accompany our adoptions, our stretched hearts grow bigger. As we watch our adopted children run happily around the house, we marvel at the divine matchmaking that connected them with us for eternity. Adoption changes us. The opportunity for personal and spiritual growth through adoption is tremendous. Let the adoption anxiety you feel push you to reflection, and then to wonder and worship. ●



Kristin with her adopted children Ben (left) and Josiah (right)

N NOVEMBER, NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH, MANY people will publicly recognize adoption as a good solution for the needs and longings of both parents and children. Many will appreciate its redemptive beauty as well as the healthy family normalcy they see in adoptive families they know. Privacy, though, mixed feelings about adoption linger. To many, adoption still seems like second-best, a tenuous way to build a family. Most parents who are blessed with adopted children will vehemently proclaim that adoption is not second-best and will try to articulate the immense joy that it has brought into their lives. But most will probably also admit that they have at times been hemmed in with insecurity and fear. My husband and I have experienced the emotional turbulence that the adoption journey brings, and we've

The 4-A way

Thoughts on National Adoption Month: Acknowledge, affirm, accept, and anticipate your way through adoption anxiety

KRISTIN SWICK-WONG

GUEST COLUMNIST