



## Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

# Angels Among Us

It's easy to see heaven in a baby. I gaze into the eyes of Camille...my adoring four-month-old who flashes a gummy smile every time I glance her way...and the radiance blinds me.

Finding a halo on a toddler who just hosted a tea party with toilet water, on the other hand, takes concerted effort. Likewise for the daughter who throws cut-up chicken in her little sister's milk and accuses her of being "evil."

I had a tough time deciding on an angle for this piece. Determined to focus on Mother's Day, I debated how to celebrate the world's deepest love without glossing over the hair-pulling frustration that threatens to leave me bald. Every time I sat down at the computer, the kids did something to annoy me—making it impossible to create pleasant commentary.

*Write when they're asleep, I told myself. When their eyes are closed, and chests are rising and falling in a sweet rhythm, they look like cherubs again.*

"Children are a gift from God" —with this I wholeheartedly agree. Never have I felt as close to the Man upstairs as I have in the delivery room, holding for the first time a slimy, seven-pound miracle pure and unblemished by a dirty world. "Euphoric" hardly describes the emotions triggered when a newborn baby crosses the line between heaven and Earth.

But in the months that follow, things inevitably change. Dinners stop streaming in, my starry eyes blur into bleary eyes, expectations and responsibilities reappear. Adrenaline rushes turn into mad rushes. I'm forced to give up guilty pleasures like "Keeping Up with the Kardashians" and emerge from hibernation.

More drastic than changes in my life are changes in the baby. She starts cooing, crawling, and cruising. She learns to talk... and talk back. Even at an early age, she shows a gift for throwing tantrums in public. Red-faced and flustered, I endure stares from shell-shocked onlookers and silently vow to never again take a baby to Target, or Old Navy, or anywhere else for that matter.

The halo is fading.

Or is it? Could it be I'm just not looking hard enough?

I had an experience last year that reminded me of God's presence in my children—even as they age and misbehave. I was lying down with Marie Claire, then two, for naptime. With her back molded against my chest, she began to suck her thumb. Gradually her eyes grew heavy. They closed. She looked so peaceful and content I stroked her milky arm until her breathing hit a slow, deep stride.

By every indication, she was asleep. Mission accomplished.

I started to slip out, but an instinct held me back. The chance to hold one child without others tearing at me like a Rotisserie chicken was too rare to let pass. With Marie Claire's warm body in my arms, a flood of sudden gratitude swept through me. *I am so blessed, I thought. Why can't I appreciate that every minute of every day? Why do I lose it when things don't go my way?*

Vaguely aware of my mouth opening, I said, "Thank you, God."

Two seconds later, Marie Claire's thumb popped out of her mouth. She looked over her shoulder and, in that melodic voice I love, whispered, "You're welcome."

Well, suffice it to say that I gaped at my child as if Lazarus had risen from the dead. Some may consider this a funny coincidence, but to me it was a testament of God's sense of humor. Somewhere above the clouds, He had to be laughing.

And it is in that spirit that I wish every mother a calamity-free Mother's Day. The angels God gives us are not the serene, harp-playing kind we see in collectible stores. Our angels have dirty faces, runny noses, impossible-to-fix hair. They generate more comedy than harmony and infuse our lives with absurdity. As imperfect as they are, however, they are perfect for us, and perfect reflections of their marvelous Creator.

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Marie Claire, Sophie, Ella, and Camille Kampakis.