



This Mother's Day, Honor Immigrant Moms



***More immigrant Moms than ever are now in detention & separated from their families
As we gratefully celebrate all MOTHERS, this year we pay special attention to immigrant
mothers, mothers in refugee camps, and pregnant women in U.S. detention centers.***

SCRIPTURE:

Isaiah 66:12-14—"For the LORD says: 'I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream; you will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees. **As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.** When you see this, your heart will rejoice and you will flourish like grass; the hand of the LORD will be made known to his servants, but his fury will be shown to his foes.'"

Isaiah 49:15—"Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you."

REFLECTION AND BACKGROUND:

By the time of Isaiah 66, the Israelites had been cut off from their land and suffered through exile for generations. Even when small groups were allowed to return to Judah after Babylon was defeated in 539, they still faced humiliation, famine, hardship, and political instability. How mentally, physically, and spiritually exhausted they must have been—and how very ready for the kind of tender and maternal love the prophet Isaiah describes God is ready to offer them!! In fact, Isaiah's image of "Mother God" promises to comfort them three separate times in verse 13. The type of comfort offered was the comfort of home—a restoration to a place of belonging, a reunion with family, a rebuilding from ruins.

Throughout this year, immigrant and refugee mothers have experienced an onslaught against family freedoms. In the Fall, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) began detaining more pregnant immigrant women, and in late March announced it was ending its general practice of releasing pregnant women from immigration detention—even when they are no flight risk or danger to the community. While the courts are challenging ICE's new policy, multiple pregnant women have already experienced severe health impacts and psychological trauma.

Family unity has been vastly undermined through current immigration enforcement policies, while America's long commitment to family based immigration is facing threats in Congress. At the same time, the Department of Homeland Security is being sued for its recent practices of intentionally separating children from their parents at the border, even though many are arriving to seek asylum through protections guaranteed under humanitarian laws. Roundups of immigrants, including ones with no criminal record and who are long and productive members of local communities and congregations, have escalated and harmed families. And families of refugees caught in the multiple refugee and Muslim travel bans remain separated from one another.

Like the Israelites of long ago, immigrant and refugee families now, perhaps more than ever, need and deserve the promise of a love from God so deep that the prophet compared it with the bond of a nursing child for their infant. May we model that depth of compassion in our own care for refugees and immigrants.

STORIES OF MOTHERS:

- Thirty-one year old asylum seeker Teresa* was arrested and placed in immigration detention in July of 2017 when four months pregnant. After her arrest, she began to experience severe pain and bleeding, but cries for help were ignored. Instead, she was transferred from a Border Patrol holding facility to an Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention center in southern California. She miscarried there. Even so, ICE has refused to release her. She is still detained and continues to experience serious medical issues, including bleeding, vomiting, and headaches even as she copes with the loss of her pregnancy. (from "The Federal Government is Detaining Pregnant Immigrants in Violation of Its Own Policy", by Victoria Lopez, ACLU.)





STORIES, continued:

Under ICE's policy, Teresa* should have been released and should have received adequate medical care. Instead, ICE is ignoring its own policy as it rapidly expands immigration detention across the country. With immigrant rights partners, the ACLU has filed an administrative complaint with the Department of Homeland Security's Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties and the Office of Inspector General, asking them to investigate ICE's treatment of pregnant women in its custody. Several women in the complaint report that they were ignored and denied immediate medical care even in cases of extreme bleeding and pain. Others said that they were concerned about their pregnancies because of previous health issues and miscarriages. Some of the women who shared their experiences in this complaint are long-time residents of the United States. Others are asylum seekers, seeking protection from abuse and trauma in their home countries. Many have young children who have been detained with them in family detention centers. Some were raped, either in their home country or during their migration. All are in detention while they await asylum interviews or hearings with immigration judges — a process that can take anywhere from a few months to several years.



- Marta is Honduran woman and in her 50's, who has lived and worked with valid work authorization for the past ten years in New Carrollton, Md., after leaving Honduras because her son Osman requires 24-hour in-home nursing care. In Md., she holds multiple jobs as a nanny and house cleaner to support her family, and sends \$600 to Honduras each month to pay for Osman's medical care. Marta also has five other children who live in the area with her, including one U.S. citizen, and two who are Dreamers. Her youngest son, 15, will be left without a mother if she is detained. She has been faithfully attending periodic check-ins at ICE for years; never considered a priority for deportation, as has had no problems with the law and poses no risk to society. However, she was told at her last ICE check-in to "show up with a ticket to Honduras next time"—even though ICE took her passport at her last appointment, and it has now expired. Her next ICE check-in is three days before Mother's Day, and the "Sanctuary DC-Md.-Va. Network" of congregations and human rights partners is working with legislators and community supporters to seek to keep her with her family through Mother's Day and beyond.

ACTIONS/RESOURCES:

- **Read the above background articles linked to in the background above. Then listen to and read this recent NPR report:** <https://www.npr.org/2018/04/05/599802820/pregnant-and-detained>, **and watch this brief ACLU video of consequences upon pregnant women who are detained, immigrant or not:** <https://www.aclu.org/video/video-pregnant-prison>
- **Join our national call-in day on Wednesday, May 9th to celebrate Mother's Day and honor immigrant moms.** No one benefits when mothers and their families cannot be together on Mother's Day or any other day.
- **SIGN ON to support Marta in fighting back against detention here:** https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe3CcQLDjrgwGssD4RoV6xCC_j33jAjyys91l08QljulyFww/viewform
- **Continue to share this devotional broadly with those you know and love, to increase awareness and prayers!**
- **Click for our Interfaith Mini-Toolkit to Honor Immigrant Moms and the top five ways everyone can take action:**
 - 1) National Call In Day: Wednesday, May 9th
 - 2) Sign the Petition: Click here to Honor All Moms this Mother's Day
 - 3) Amplify on Social Media: Click Here for Sample Social Media Posts
 - 4) Write Opinion Editorials for Local Media Outlets: Click Here for Template Mother's Day Op-Ed
 - 5) Plan an In-District Visit with your Members of Congress During May Recess
- **Share a support message like this with an immigrant Mom (English and Spanish samples provided.):**

ENGLISH Happy Mothers' Day! We stand in solidarity with you. Today we celebrate the love and strength of mothers like you.

SPANISH ¡Feliz día de la madre! Manifestamos en solidaridad contigo.

Hoy celebramos el amor y la fuerza de madres como tú.

PRAYER: On Mothers' Day and beyond, let us rejoice and proclaim the goodness of all mothers who continually manifest their love for their children. May we remember all immigrant and refugee mothers, especially pregnant women held in detention in this country and all who experience or dread separation from their families. May all mothers be held in God's loving embrace.

Amen.