

*Come Holy Spirit  
Use me to Your glory*

*"A Time to be Born and a Time to Die"  
Ecclesiastes 3:2*

*"Happy Birthday to you,  
Happy Birthday to you,  
Happy Birthday, dear baby,  
Happy Birthday to you."*

*Precious Pilgrim,*

*Hope you don't mind, but I needed to get that celebration song out before I could begin your today's letter.*

*I was about to pop! A joyful bubbling up in my spirit has been coming forth ever since I heard the news. An effervescent interior smile has blossomed into an all out wide mouth exterior grin. Fanfare trumpets and a drum roll, please. May I proudly announce the birth of my newest relative. Weighing in at 8 lbs., 11 oz. and 21 inches long, he is the fourth child of his parents. He's being enthusiastically gazed upon at the hospital by his three siblings, who can't wait to get him home to play.*

*His beautiful mother is recuperating nicely, as is his father. She's one of those calming earth mother types. You just want to go sit in her lap and be rocked and held, even though you're middle aged, at least that has been my own personal experience. (As you can tell, Pilgrim, I'm mighty proud of this young lady.)*

*While I'm giving accolades, I'd better mention the maternal grandparents. The baby's mother is the second of their four children. And then there's the paternal grandparents. The baby's daddy is the oldest of their three children.*

*Are you following all of this, Pilgrim? Believe you me, I could go on, even though I'm not the genealogist of our family. Instead, I'll just make mention of the only reference to the word "family" or "families" found in the New Testament. Paul says in Ephesians 3:14,15 - "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named."*

*Now that, Pilgrim, is a pretty impressive family tree, don't you think? No wonder there are no other verses found in the New Testament, no more needs to be said!*

*Sorry, however, that's not true in your letter's case. I must continue and go on record to say that on this day, the baby's birthday, there is no one more excited or thrilled or delighted than the head of this family, the grand dame of grand dames, the beautiful matriarch, the baby's great-grandmother.*

*And what did she do when she heard about the family's newest arrival? Why, she did something which she very seldom does. She told me over the phone that she cried. You see, she has numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren, but this is a first. This precious baby (as all babies are, precious,*

*that is) is named for his great-grandfather - who was and is and will always be for all eternity, the love of her life.*

*And as their youngest daughter, I know this is the truth. I had the privilege of getting to live in the family of such love for 27 years until my Daddy's death of a heart attack at age 59.*

*And as the youngest daughter, I know this is a truth. I have had the privilege of getting to live in the family of such love for 29 years since my Daddy's death.*

*The love continues -- just as Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 13:8 -- "Love never comes to an end."*

*And what is just as profoundly mysteriously wonderful is that Mama has often declared that it was her husband's love that taught her about the love of God. I concur, in that my Daddy's unconditional love did the same for me. I believe true unconditional love can be the best experience on this side of heaven to teach us about the love of Christ.*

*Praise the Lord, this is not just my experience. I pray, Pilgrim, you have had such love. And just last week I learned of another.*

*I attended "A Service of Celebration and Resurrection" for the father of a relative. And as you can gather from the name of the service written on the church bulletin, it was a glorious celebration of a Christian life well lived.*

*My only regret was that I hadn't gotten to know this gentleman better. We'd only been together at a few large*

*family gatherings - weddings, Thanksgivings, Christmas, which are not conducive to intimate, in-depth conversations. I knew he and his wife were a fine Christian family just because of knowing their exemplary son.*

*It was an awesome privilege at the church service to hear what he had done during his lifetime - to learn of his mission work and his Sunday School teaching and his choir singing and his deaconship.*

*Ministers praised and prayed. The choir and congregation sang in celebration of a life well lived. And when I heard the age old hymn "It is Well With My Soul" sung as a duet, I believe all gathered were silently united in this declaration that "yes, indeed" - it was well and is well and will always be well with this gentleman for all eternity. For you see, as his son wrote in the service bulletin, when speaking of his father, "He knew Christ."*

*Isn't that an awesome statement for a son to make about his father? Is there any better, Pilgrim?*

*Ah, but may I quote his whole last paragraph. All that was said and sung touched my heart, but these words, even more so -*

*He concluded his tribute to his Dad with:*

*"I knew him as my father. I loved it when he would throw a football and baseball with me in the back yard and let me beat him in basketball. I loved the family trips and going to the river. He always wanted to spend time with me and be*

*involved in what was going on in my life. He was the Best Man in my wedding. He enjoyed being a father. He taught me about love and ultimately God's unfailing and unconditional love. He taught me how to be a father."*

*Wow! A lump forms in my throat once more as I copy these words over to share with you, Pilgrim. Wow!*

*Nothing more needs to be said, but what floats into my mind is Matthew 25:21, which is repeated in Matthew 25:23:*

*"His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."*

*I believe this Christian gentleman has now heard such words and has now entered into such joy...*

*In this letter, Pilgrim, we've gone from a celebration of a new life to a celebration of a life well lived. Although, these two huge human events occurred days apart, for me, there was a moment in which they seemed to almost coincide and collide.*

*As I sat next to the baby's mother at the service just days before she delivered, she let me quietly touch her gloriously large pregnant tummy when the baby kicked. At that moment, life and death seemed so close to each other.*

*And do you know, Pilgrim, what seems to knit all human experiences together? I would have to say, I believe - it is love - unconditional love - Christ-like agape love.*

*"He taught me about love and ultimately God's unfailing and unconditional love."*

*These are the son's words.*

*They could be my words.*

*I pray, Pilgrim, that they could be yours.*

*And someday*

*Our newest family member's.*

*"A time to be born and a time to die." Ecclesiastes 3:2 - such has been this week's experiences - ah, but love, by God's grace and Christ's cross - that experience is for all eternity!*

*I am your sister in Christ,*

*Lucy*