

Becoming a Mother: The Matrescence Process

The Wired Word for the Week of May 10, 2026

In the News

In 2024, science journalist Lucy Jones published her book [Matrescence: On Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Motherhood](#) to describe a period of upheaval and transformation similar to adolescence that brings radical physical, emotional and psychological changes as a woman transitions into motherhood. Coined in the 1970s by anthropologist Dana Raphael, the term "matrescence" is still not found in many dictionaries, but every new mother recognizes that something profound is changing during this period.

As Jones told a group of new mothers, "In some cultures and societies around the world, there is a sense of the newborn mother, and that a mother is born at the same time as a baby.

"Before I had my first child, I had little idea about what becoming a mother would entail. ... I thought that I would still be the same person when she was born," Jones explained. "When the baby was born, I had an uncanny sense that the old me was dead. I found this disturbing. I had gone, but I didn't know where. My brain and patterns of thought felt different, as if I had been rewired. I was expected to breeze through new motherhood, to 'bounce back' and crack on as normal. But I felt as if I'd been cracked open."

During matrescence, a woman's sense of who she is changes; she has a new identity, new priorities, responsibilities and values, different relationships, and a new daily routine.

According to actress Jessica Lange, "The natural state of motherhood is unselfishness. When you become a mother, you are no longer the center of your own universe. You relinquish that position to your children."

"I had thought that my disrupted sense of self, my notion that I'd become a new hybrid creature, must be in some way fanciful," Jones said. In fact, "it was the idea that I was ultimately an independent individual that was fanciful."

Women experiencing matrescence may feel complex emotions in rapid succession or all at the same time: feelings of joy, anxiety, guilt, uncertainty, depression, loneliness, isolation, shame, exhilaration, loss, fear, empathy, achievement, overwhelm, and personal growth.

Jones cautions that "women are still expected to have children, glorified for reproducing, and judged if they don't, but it is hollow lip service and comes with oppressive pressures to be perfect and ever-giving, rather than what's really needed: adequate healthcare, social infrastructure and support. ... mothers in this vulnerable period need protective social policies and infrastructure,

such as libraries, childcare centers, child-friendly transport networks, affordable childcare and investment in perinatal healthcare."

The proverb, from African or perhaps Native American tradition, that "it takes a village to raise a child" might apply here, especially if we also add that "it takes a village to raise a mother."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Understanding Matrescence: A Guide for New Moms. *Tommee Tippee*](#)

['Matrescence,' and the Transformations of Motherhood. *The New Yorker*](#)

[Understanding Matrescence -- The Word Every New Mother Needs to Know. *Positive News*](#)

Applying the News Story

The Bible contains many portrayals of women who had different experiences with infertility, pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood, including Sarah ([Genesis 21:1-8](#)) and Elizabeth ([Luke 1:5-25, 36-45, 56-58](#)), who bore children in their old age; Rebekah, who had a difficult pregnancy before giving birth to twin boys ([Genesis 25:21-24](#)); Jacob's two wives and their two handmaids, who gave birth to his 12 sons and a daughter ([Genesis 35:22-26](#)); the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah, who protected other women's sons at great risk to their own lives and were blessed with children of their own because of their courageous actions ([Exodus 1:15-21](#)); the enslaved birth mother of Moses and the Egyptian princess who adopted him ([Exodus 2:1-10](#)); Deborah, a wife, prophet, judge, and leader who is described as "a mother in Israel" ([Judges 4:4-5; 5:7](#)); and many others.

Use the news to explore how our faith speaks to the experiences and needs of women as they transition into motherhood, in biblical times and currently.

The Big Questions

1. What do you notice about how the topic of motherhood is handled in the Bible?
2. What does the church teach regarding motherhood?
3. When mothers are praised and elevated on Mother's Day, how are those who are not biological mothers affected?
4. What balancing messages can be considered when highlighting the role of mother?
5. How can serving as a maternal guardian/caregiver fulfill the blessings of motherhood?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

1 Samuel 1:20, 26-28

In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the LORD." ... And she said [to Eli], "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence praying to the LORD. For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me the petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives, he is given to the LORD." And they worshiped the LORD there. (For context, read [1 Samuel 1:19-28](#).)

Hannah is one of the many women in the Bible who struggled with the trauma of infertility. Her husband's other wife had many children and taunted her mercilessly because of her barrenness. Hannah experienced deep depression, even though her husband loved her greatly. She prayed fervently for a son, promising to dedicate him to God's service, and God answered her prayer. After the child was weaned, she brought him to the temple and presented him to Eli the priest to begin his apprenticeship.

Saint Augustine's mother, Saint Monica, prayed for her son, who was slow to adopt her wisdom, and yet he came to faith and had a great impact on others to this day. (Pope Leo XIV is from the Augustinian tradition.) How often mothers and mother-figures share their wisdom, hopes and prayers for children and youth to make good choices, live rightly and have faith, and then wait patiently for the results.

Questions: What is the role of prayer in the life of a parent and child? How can mothers and mother-figures keep trusting God patiently to work in the lives of children and youth for whom they are praying?

1 Kings 3:25-27

The king said, "Divide the living boy in two; then give half to the one and half to the other." But the woman whose son was alive said to the king, because compassion for her son burned within her, "Please, my lord, give her the living boy; certainly do not kill him!" The other said, "It shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it." Then the king responded, "Give her the living boy; do not kill him. She is his mother." (For context, read [1 Kings 3:16-28](#).)

This court case concerns two women who lived together, each of whom had given birth to a boy. One boy died in the night when his mother lay on him. She switched her dead child with the other mother's living son while her housemate slept. When the second woman woke up the next morning, she discovered the deception and realized that her son had been kidnapped.

There were no other witnesses who could testify to the truth, since no one else was in the house at the time. So King Solomon had a "she said, she said" problem. How could he discover who was the living child's real mother?

Questions: What qualities in the two women did Solomon observe to determine who was the boy's mother? What qualities are essential for someone to become a true mother?

Luke 2:17-19, 51

When [the shepherds] saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ... Then [Jesus] went down with [Mary and Joseph] and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them, and his mother treasured all these things in her heart. (For context, read [Luke 2:15-20, 41-51](#).)

After Mary gave birth to the baby Jesus, shepherds visited the Holy Family in Bethlehem, declaring what the angels had told them about the child. Mary's response was one of wonder and contemplation.

Twelve years later, after the family celebrated the Passover in Jerusalem, Mary and Joseph began the return trip home, but then realized that Jesus was not with the group. He had stayed behind in the temple, where he was peppering the teachers with questions and amazing everyone with his insight. When Mary questioned him about what he was doing there, his answer revealed that he already had a vision of his life's purpose and primary allegiance to his heavenly Father.

Upon returning home with his parents, Jesus obeyed them, and Mary "treasured all these things in her heart." While the experience of matrescence is probably most intense during pregnancy and in the first year after giving birth, it appears that Mary kept growing as a mother throughout her life, as God kept revealing more of the divine character and design in and through her son.

Questions: Whether or not you have ever been a mother, how might you experience a kind of matrescence-like growth in your own relationship with God? What do you treasure in your heart about what God is revealing to you through Jesus? Through a child you know?

Luke 2:36-38

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. (For context, read [Luke 2:36-40](#).)

Luke doesn't tell us whether Anna ever became a mother. The fact that she lived to an old age makes us think she might not have given birth, since that was often a fatal condition in that era. She may have taken up residence in the temple not only out of devotion to the worship of God, but out of necessity, since she may well have been thrust into poverty upon becoming a widow if

she had no son to provide for her needs. And yet, Anna is named as a prophet who spoke about the Christ Child long before his messianic identity was made known to the world.

Questions: How might Anna have served as a kind of mother-figure or second mother to Mary, who was experiencing the radical transformation from girlhood into motherhood? What does this tell us about who God can use to mother people who need maternal care?

For Further Discussion

1. Consider these reflections shared by TWW team members:

"I think it is a tough call for churches when it comes to celebrating Mother's Day. It's not a biblical holiday. It's kind of a greeting-card holiday. I certainly observed it as a dutiful son, and as a husband," said Frank Ramirez. "But for some people it's a difficult holiday because their mother wasn't very nice. For some it's hard because their mother is gone. And it reminds those who were unable to become a mom, despite their hopes, that their life is, in their view, incomplete. Others who may have chosen not to have children may be made to feel like there's something wrong with them.

"One church I served gave one color rose to those whose mother was alive, and another color rose to those whose mother had died," Ramirez added. "I think the last two churches I served had no observance of any kind because some might feel left out."

"I never married or had children and, at 67 years old, I still feel like I have to explain my life to others as if I am 'less than' for never being a wife or mother," Mary Sells commented. "Maybe it is the time and place I grew up where that was the path society expected? I am surrounded by people who have kids, grandkids and even some great-grandkids who are the focus of their lives.

"I have had a pretty amazing life to date, living and traveling many places and all the interesting and wonderful things that has encompassed -- probably because I didn't have that root in one place," Sells continued. "It gave my faith a rich tapestry of learning and growing from many sources that I cannot imagine could have happened any other way. God found me everywhere until I found God everywhere!"

"Mother's Day can be challenging for non-mothers, including those who are childless by circumstance or choice, or for nurturing figures like aunts and mentors," remarked Liz Antonson. "It is a day to honor all women, acknowledging the 'nurturing heart' beyond biology, or simply treating it as a normal day to avoid triggers."

What has been your experience of the way churches you have attended handled Mother's Day? What was the impact of that approach?

2. Boston Mayor Michelle Wu stated, "Women especially are often asked to choose between being a mother and being a leader. Without adequate policy support, too many women face not only financial barriers to balancing motherhood and leadership, but cultural stigmas too."

Film producer Nell Scovell agreed: "I think, in all fields, there's this motherhood pay penalty where, the second you become a mother -- and this is true whether you give birth or adopt -- you're perceived to not be as committed to your job, whereas men are perceived as breadwinners who now need more money and promotions because they're fathers."

What have you experienced or observed about the challenges mothers face in navigating the demands of family and the workplace?

3. "Motherhood was the great equalizer for me; I started to identify with everybody," said singer-songwriter Annie Lennox. "As a mother, you have that impulse to wish that no child should ever be hurt, or abused, or go hungry, or not have opportunities in life." If you are a mother, how, if at all, has becoming a mother altered your perspectives or values?

4. [Non-biological mother-figures](#) may include stepmothers, mothers-in-law, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, godmothers, foster mothers, pastors, teachers, workplace mentors, neighbors, coaches and others. "When I moved away from home, I was grateful for women who 'mothered' me when distance made it harder to connect with my birth mother at times," TWW Team Member Joanna Loucky-Ramsey said. "One relationship in particular grew so deep that I felt like I had a second mom!" Paul referred to the mother of Rufus as a woman who had become like a mother to him as well ([Romans 16:13](#)). And he tells Timothy to treat older women as mothers ([1 Timothy 5:1-2](#)). Who, if anyone, has been like a second mother to you, and why do you feel that way about that person? When have you become a kind of mother to someone who was not related to you?

Responding to the News

Brainstorm ways you and your church can [offer support to new mothers](#) as they adjust to their new role.

Consider partnering with a group like [Chamber of Mothers](#) to improve maternal health, eliminate childcare deserts, and advocate for policies to ensure access to affordable childcare and paid family leave.

Prayer suggested by [Psalm 103:13-14](#); [Isaiah 66:13](#); [Isaiah 49:14-16](#); [Psalm 27:10](#)

Nurturing God, who has compassion on your children and who comforts us, taking us up in your everlasting arms even if our earthly parents forget or forsake us, thank you for caring for us so faithfully and consistently. May we learn from you to show the same compassion so that all your children may know your love, for Jesus' sake. Amen.