

Erin Shoemake, Assistant to the Executive Vice President and Provost



God placed adoption on our hearts years ago, but we always thought it would be something we might do “one of these days.” We finally decided to start the adoption process in the fall of 2014. During the next two-and-a-half years, God put a hole in our hearts that was very specific, and we know in hindsight that He was preparing us for our daughter.

We had come close to bringing a baby home earlier in the process through the first agency we worked with, but for various reasons we felt like that situation was not a good fit for us. It was a difficult and painful decision, but we knew it was the right one. After a year-and-a-half working with one agency, we found ourselves needing to switch agencies and start the whole process over. When we received the surprise call this spring that a birth mom had chosen us to adopt her two-week-old baby girl, we had no doubt in our minds that this was the baby God intended for us.

We brought her home when she was almost three weeks old and named her Naomi Grace. She is now almost seven months old, and we are overjoyed to have recently finalized the adoption. Even though the process was trying at times, we saw God’s hand in it every step of the way, and we had a sea of support. Our families were supportive, my Baylor coworkers were amazing, and once word got out that we were pursuing adoption, so many people who were either adopted or who had adopted children themselves reached out to us.

One of the blessings of the process taking longer than it could have was the announcement from Baylor on March 2017 about the new parental leave and adoption assistance programs. This offered much-needed financial support as well as emotional affirmation to see a major university prioritize benefits for adoptive parents. Just one week after that announcement, we received “the call.”

Adoption has given us renewed perspective on God’s love for us, and Naomi has expanded our hearts in ways we never imagined.

- Erin Shoemake

Dr. Mark Bryant, Director of International Student and Scholar Services



We have three children: Two of them were adopted from China. Joshua, 6, and Lillian, 2, were both born in China. Sam, 2, was born in Waco. Our family picture is an especially beautiful one!

Adoption had always been in our hearts. We knew God had that planned for our story from the beginning. We could see how God had adopted us into his family as well as how he wanted us to care for orphans, so we entered into adoption confident that God would lead us. We did wonder how we would be able to afford it.

Because we chose to adopt children with special needs, we also worried about how we would handle that and what additional resources it would require. In both cases, we had supportive family and friends, a church that encouraged us through the process and gave financially, and for our second adoption, we were able to petition for funds from Baylor. In both cases, our adoptions were basically paid for by the time we got on a plane to go to China! It was such a comfort knowing that we could return home and focus on connecting with our children rather than worrying about expenses. The adoption community is big and supportive, so we never felt alone in the process.

Adoption seems so normal to us. I cannot imagine our lives differently. We are regularly told that our children are blessed to have been brought into our family, but God has used the process to broaden our dependence on him and to show us his great love. It has certainly created more opportunities to trust him with every part of our lives including walking with our children through some painful parts of their stories. Our kids will wrestle with their stories and who they are but we have the pleasure and the responsibility to hold their hands as they make the journey. It's difficult and wonderful and messy and beautiful and exhausting and energizing! Most of all, it is redemptive for all of us.

- Mark Bryant