

The second son of Emilia and Karol Wojtyła was born on 18 May 1920, sometime around five o'clock in the afternoon. The child was an extraordinarily large, strong and healthy boy, who cried loudly, as if wanting to outshout the congregation singing their litany in the nearby church.

When the midwife placed the new-born infant on his mother's bosom, she saw tears streaming over Emilia's face, but also a smile on her lips as well. The mother was moved, but was also experiencing a deep sense of joy and good fortune at the miracle: for both the child, and she, had survived. Moreover, instead of the sickly, weak child that had been predicted, the child she gave birth to was healthy and strong.

The impossible had become possible.

According to Jadwiga Pawłęga, she was to remember that birth for the rest of her life! She'd never assisted at such an unusual childbirth, as she said, during the intoning of the Litany to our Lady of Loretto, as Michał Siwec-Cielebon emphasises.

Later on, in Wadowice, Pawłęga would say that Emilia had been very weak, but she bravely endured the ordeal of giving birth, as Józef Klauzner states. This is the account given by C. Bernstein in his book: 'When the moment to give birth arrived, Emilia asked the midwife to open the window. She wanted the first sounds that the new-born child would hear to be a hymn sung in praise of Mary, the Mother of God.'

The Pope himself was well acquainted with this story.

'I know that the Holy Father had spoken about this with the midwife who helped bring him into the world, and later, he spoke to me of entering life to the strains of a litany sung in praise of the Mother of God,' says Stanisław Cardinal Dziwisz.

The Pope noticed other significant coincidences as well. On his birthday in 1997 he told one of his Italian parishes, 'I was born between five and six o'clock in the afternoon, which is the same hour at which, fifty-eight years later, I was elected Pope.'

Just as the word "yes," spoken by Emilia Wojtyła in 1920, had to be one of the most difficult words she ever enunciated, so in 1978, that other "yes" was the most difficult word spoken by her son, when he was asked if he would accept his election to the Holy See. With their *fiat*, both of them – mother and son – agreed to self-denial. As if they knew that only at such a price could great things be brought into the world.

[...] According to the midwife's account, after the child's birth, Emilia couldn't wait for Karol and Edmund to return from church. When they came home, the new-

born boy was already asleep. His parents and brother looked down upon the little one. To which of them was the infant most similar?

His likeness to his mother was obvious.

You can see this in photographs. Even in the very first, earliest ones taken in Wadowice, where the mother is holding her son in her arms as a baby. One can see those same features, eyes, the shape of the face. Even many years later, when one looks at photos of the Pope, one can see the common traits shared by son and mother. The most striking thing about these photos, perhaps, is the expression of their eyes. One sees goodness, gentleness, and yet the glance penetrates one deeply. 'The Pope inherited an uncanny resemblance to his mother,' Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński, Primate of Poland, was to say years later, 'The similarity of the two faces, that of the mother and of the child, speaks volumes.'

The boy's parents christened him with two names: Karol Józef.

Excerpt translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



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MILENA
KINDZIUK

Born 1970

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[Emilia and Karol Wojtyła. John Paul II's Parents]

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Foreign language translations

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Selected awards

Catholic Publishers' Association Award FENIKS (2016)

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