

# Look! Believe! Rejoice!

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*The Nativity of Our Lord—Christmas Eve Early (24 December 2011)*  
*Candlelight Lessons and Carols*  
*General Homily*

Dearest children of the heavenly Father:

There is so much to contemplate, so much to take in, so much to take to heart, so much to live from ... in tonight's Scripture readings. And it all centers in a newborn Babe, wrapped up in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.

- ✓ He who will one day walk on water cannot yet walk Himself.
- ✓ He who will one day feed 5000 cannot yet feed Himself.
- ✓ He who will one day lift up the lame cannot yet stand Himself.
- ✓ He who will one day speak words of forgiveness cannot yet speak Himself.
  
- ✓ He who will one day free mankind from the stench of sin first finds Himself in a smelly stable.
- ✓ He who will one day be nailed to the wood of the cross first finds Himself lying in the wood of a manger.
- ✓ He who will one day be wrapped in linen cloths following His death first finds Himself wrapped in swaddling cloths following His birth.
  
- ✓ He who will one day be the Bread of Life who satisfies man's greatest hunger is first born in a village whose name means "house of bread."
- ✓ He who will one day be the Good Shepherd who gives up His life for the sheep is first visited by local shepherds.
- ✓ He who will one day be the Light of the world who scatters the darkness of sin is first visited by wise men who follow the light of a star.

Yes, there is so much to contemplate, so much to take in, so much to take to heart, so much to live from ... in tonight's Scripture readings. And it all centers in a newborn Babe, wrapped up in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.

So take a closer look.

Look at His little *head*, formed in His mother's womb to be pierced with a crown of thorns.

Look at His little *hands and feet*, formed in His mother's womb to be pierced with nails.

Look at His little *side*, formed in His mother's womb to be pierced with a spear.

Look at His little *back*, formed in His mother's womb to receive the lashes of an ungrateful world.

Look at His little *eyes*, formed in His mother's womb to see the hatred of those for whom He's come.

Look at His little *mouth*, formed in His mother's womb to speak words of forgiveness that largely fall on deaf ears.

Look at His little *ears*, formed in His mother's womb to hear words of betrayal, accusation, and "Crucify Him!"

Look at His little *heart*, formed in His mother's womb to throb with a love that is infinitely more powerful than the thorns, the nails, the spear, the lashes, the hatred, the deaf ears, and the betrayal. For this little heart is big enough to love the whole world unconditionally—even you, a poor, miserable sinner.

If you look closely, with the eyes of faith, you will see Him. Even here tonight. In this manger called Divine Shepherd. In these swaddling cloths called the sacred Scriptures. He is here. Immanuel is even now with you, saving you from your sin.

Now that you've looked, believe! For Christ, the Lord, is born *for you*. Yes, *you!* Fess up. You need this Savior. His forgiveness. His healing. His peace. After all, that Christmas photo you sent out—the one with everyone smiling and happy—is only half the story. For behind that photoshopped version of you is a person with flaws and imperfections, weaknesses and failings. A person who speaks unkind words. A person who harbors grudges and anger and resentment. A person who is quick to see the speck in the eyes of others, but blind when it comes to the log in your own eye. A person whose prayer and devotional life is not what it should be. I know this because, to one extent or another, it is true of each one of us. God's Word says so. **"I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh,"** writes the Apostle Paul. **"For I have the desire to do what is right, but**

**not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Romans 7:18-19).**

But here’s the good new of great joy that God’s Son came to deliver. Your sins, which once separated you from God, have been taken away and paid for by this Christ-child. All those evil thoughts and desires, all those unkind words, all those sinful deeds ... gone. Forgiven. Removed from you as far as the east is from the west. And in return, He gives you His perfect righteousness!

That is who this Christ-child is. The world’s Savior. *Your* Savior. So take up your cross and follow Him. Repent and believe. Live your baptism. Daily die to sin and rise to newness of life in Him. There may not have been room in the inn, but let there be room in your heart, your mind, your life, and your schedule for Him whose tiny arms are yet long enough to include you in His warm embrace.

And now that you’ve looked and believed, rejoice! For this Babe gives you...

- ✓ reason to *celebrate*;
- ✓ reason to *return* to God’s house regularly and worship Him;
- ✓ reason to *hear* all that He has to say;
- ✓ reason to *believe* all that He has done for you;
- ✓ reason to *shape your life* by every word that comes from His mouth;
- ✓ reason to *sing His praises* with the angels;
- ✓ reason to *glorify and praise Him* with the shepherds;
- ✓ reason to *kneel down and adore Him* with the wise men;
- ✓ reason to *ponder* all these things in your heart with Mary.

Look. Believe. Rejoice. For God’s Son has become a child of Man, that in Him you might become a child of God! What else is there to say, but to pray...

O holy Child of Bethlehem,  
Descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin and enter in,  
Be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
The great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us,  
Our Lord Immanuel!  
[LSB 361, stanza 4]

Merry Christmas to you and yours!!!

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Jesus Christ unto life everlasting.

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