

## Christmas Eve

When I was a newborn baby boy, my mother quickly learned two characteristics about me. I cried incessantly, and I had large feet. My feet were so large that nurses from around the hospital dropped by my mother's room so that they could see my feet with their own eyes. That didn't bother her. I was her third child. But she could not figure out why I cried so much. Compared with my older sister and brother, I seemed to be perpetually unhappy about something. It was one of the questions she planned to ask God after she died. I hope by now she has the mystery resolved. Today I wonder if I just didn't like the fact that I was a baby. I would have been happier as an adult.

I do enjoy seeing all the newborn children who come through the door of our church. I love to see the happiness on the faces of their parents. In some cases I've celebrated the wedding of the parents, and they are especially joyful to present their firstborn child. Not every child is so welcome. Some parents who are unmarried conceive a child before they were ready for one. Other parents have several children already, and the conception of another child causes as much stress as happiness. Sometimes they receive a child with emotional or physical challenges. Children are especially welcome when the parents have so much love for each other that they want to share it with someone else. No matter the circumstances, though, a newborn child promises hope.

The first reading for this Christmas mass includes one of the most joyful proclamations in the prophecy of Isaiah: "a child is born to us, a son is given us." The good news comes not just to a family but to an entire people. They have been in exile, suffering from inadequate light and overabundant sorrow. They have worked as slaves, and they have lost lives in battle. They've had too little food and too few possessions. But now all that is changed. The child is destined to become a leader who will continue the successes of the past, extend the geographical boundaries of their nation, and provide justice and peace that will endure for generations to come. A new child makes an impact in your family, but that child also creates changes for the neighborhood, the church, and all of society. When you look at an infant, you cannot tell what lies in store. The child carries tremendous potential, and the joy we feel is a sign of our hope.

It is also a sign of our need. We all need to love and to be loved, and that need often bears fruit in the arrival of a child. No one is more needy than a child. Every child needs someone else to offer basic care. This is what makes it so stunning that the Son of God entered our world as a child, someone we think needs care, not someone who gives care. Yet as Isaiah says, this child is "Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace." His dominion is geographically vast and perpetually peaceful. He will rule by judgment and justice. Christmas turns our identity upside down. It is not the day when adults in Bethlehem took care of a newborn child; it's the day a newborn child arrived in Bethlehem to take care of adults. There are days when life moves you to tears, when you cry like a newborn baby. Sometimes you cannot always tell what is wrong or how to make it better. But this much you do know, that into our world of sorrow a child is born for us, a child who brings hope, a child of God's love. He is Christ the Lord.

Saturday, December 24, 2016