

## Christmas Eve

When I was young, I asked my mother what she remembered about me as a newborn. I am the third of six children. The first four of us were born at a New Orleans hospital a few blocks from our home. Mom already had four years of experience as a mother. She remembered two things about my infancy—one at the hospital, and the other at home. At the hospital my most distinguishing characteristic was not how cute I was but the size of my feet. They were large for a newborn. Mom remembers nurses popping by her room to ask if they could see the baby with the big feet. Her second memory was at home. She recalled not how loving I was but that I cried incessantly, much more than my older sister and brother had done. Mom never figured out how to get me to stop. She planned to ask God about this after she died: Why did her third child cry so much?

Any baby attracts attention. People want to take a look, even to hold a newborn in their arms, or better yet to look and hold for a long period of time. A baby is mesmerizing. You can look endlessly into a child's eyes. They fill you with wonder and love. Parents dream about what their child will be. Many want the kid to have opportunities where they had none, to succeed where they failed, to gain fame where they found obscurity, to bring what the world lacked. All I offered my hope-filled parents was my feet and my tears.

When Isaiah described Israel's new hope in today's first reading, he foresaw a child. Not a fragile child, but one of uncommon strength. Like a parent gazing into the eyes of a newborn and considering the future, Isaiah saw a child who would answer needs. The world was asking God to work new wonders, give sound advice, show might against oppressors, remove the fear of leaving orphans, and take the scourge of war away from their land. Isaiah lists these titles for this newborn: Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. He would bring all that the world lacked.

Christmas celebrates the birth of the child Isaiah foresaw. The God who made us became like us, coming in the most appealing form: an infant, a child we want to see and hold, and into whose eyes we gaze long and lovingly. But where typical parents hope that their child will succeed, angels and shepherds knew the future of this child: a savior who came to those upon whom God's favor rests.

We each come to Christmas aware of what our world lacks. We struggle with a persisting pandemic and the maelstrom of opinions around its management. We wonder who the real experts are in health care, politics, education and faith. We feel helpless against violence in our city. We worry about the values our children learn from the internet and video games. We suffer from the misguided belief that we can solve it all, that we have strength to overcome our temptations, to have others see things our way, and to secure a comfortable future. We can't. We really don't know it all—we are infants in this cosmos.

But someone has come among us. He is all we really need. He came as a child so that we would want to gaze into his eyes and see a bright future. He came for you and for me. He is Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. He is the Son of God, the savior, the Christ, and his parents named him Jesus.