



## Editor

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## Cover Art

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December 21

## The Feast of Saint Thomas

John 21:27-28

Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Poor Thomas. Ask almost any Christian what word they associate most readily with "Thomas," and I am almost certain the word would be "doubt." Doubting Thomas. Who wants to go down through history with a name like that?

I for one do not believe such a name is deserved. Yes, Thomas was the one who doubted that Jesus had been raised, bodily, from the dead. Yes, he expressed his doubts so eloquently, exclaiming that unless he put his fingers in the nail holes himself, he would not believe Jesus was alive. Yes, he was the one chastised by Jesus with those famous words, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 21:29). But Thomas was also one of the greatest Christian missionaries. Churches in Kerala State, India, attribute their founding to the preaching of Jesus by Thomas. He was stoned to death and stabbed with a spear by the upper-class rulers of the area.

Thomas, in many ways, is a picture of all Christians. At some point in our lives, we too have doubted the promises of Jesus. We may be torn by doubts even today. We may wish we could see the nail holes in Jesus' resurrected wrists, and put our hand in the side from which poured blood and water.

But in those moments of doubt, the Spirit comes and guides us to the places where the blood and water of Jesus can be found: the font, the altar, and the Word preached even by Thomas. We go out into the world to proclaim the birth, death and resurrection of the Son of God. After times of doubting we still find ourselves echoing the words of Thomas, "My Lord, and my God!"

By Rev. Charles St Onge

### Prayer

*Lord Jesus,  
when we doubt,  
come to us and  
bid us to stop  
doubting, and  
believe.  
Amen.*

## December 25

Zechariah 9:9

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

“Still, still, still...” On Christmas Eves I can still hear the parish choir of Zion Lutheran Church in Wilton, Iowa, singing the old German carol. The sound is such an integral part of the Christmas experience in my memory that their performance of it should be copyrighted. I also prefer the serene “O Little Town of Bethlehem” (think “how silently, how silently”) to the boisterous “Joy the World,” and not just because Christmas morning with three children leaves me seriously wanting a sensory deprivation chamber.

God comes gently. God approaches quietly. This is the message, the truth, and the Gospel of Christmas. On a donkey. As a baby. Asking nothing. He makes no threats. He does not rush in, jump out, or drop by. God draws near. “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.” To frightened, injured creatures such as men, such as sinful mortals, as we are, the approach is everything. Salvation lands and detonates silently – not only on Christmas, but in our hearts – drops of water – and every time – crumbs of bread; it is not just how He is, it is who He is.

Nevertheless, God works powerfully. God acts mightily. He is King, righteous and having salvation. Herod trembles, and all Jerusalem with him. The ancient course of stars bends. Myriad angels cleave the night. Their song echoes still. The shock wave of forgiveness, the blast force, shook the earth and quenched the sun when it reached ground zero – the cross, where our sin and God’s gift intersected. Expect it from God still; he has arrived and he will deliver. He has come, and He will save. God speaks softly, but wields a big sword.

By Rev. Michael Salemink

### Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ, come quietly and gently to lay my fears to rest; and act mightily to save me from the force of my own sin. Amen.*

## December 22

Luke 2:10-11

And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Christmas time is, especially for children, a time of anticipation and eager expectation. As each gift is placed under the tree, it is examined to see to whom it is being given and from whom it came. When we see the package is for us, we begin to speculate over its shape and size. Sometimes we secretly give it a shake. We are hoping that it is something special and wonderful.

When the angel of the Lord announced the birth of Jesus, he was announcing the delivery of a gift “To You.” The Christ child was a gift for you, from God. The Almighty Father wanted to give His creation, His children something truly special and wonderful, so He sent His Son into the world for you.

To most people a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger may not seem like much of a gift. For many there is an inclination to give a half-hearted thanks and forget about this gift that is of no use anyway. Bah! Humbug!

But, through the eyes of faith, Jesus is seen as the greatest gift of all! He was given to us to meet our greatest need, the forgiveness of sins. He was sent to fulfill our unknown desire, reconciliation with our Creator. For us, Jesus is Good News. To those who know Him and have a relationship with Him, He is the source of the greatest joy there is. Christmas, a child, a Savior, and joy—these are God’s gifts “To You.”

By Rev. Richard Gizynski

### Prayer

*Almighty Father, I give thanks to you for your blessings. I know that you only want good things for me. Thank you for the wondrous gift of your Son, my Savior, Jesus Christ. May this Good News fill all my days with joy. Amen.*

December 23

Luke 2:13

And suddenly  
there was with  
the angel a multi-  
tude of the heav-  
enly host prais-  
ing God and say-  
ing...

Among the many orchestras, choirs and soloists who perform Handel's *Messiah*, it is worth knowing that some of those come from our nation's armed forces. For example, a good number of soldiers and their families took part in a performance with local community members in Heidelberg, Germany last month. Why have I mentioned this connection with the military? Consider for a moment the group that appeared with the angel in heralding the good news of our Savior's birth.

As if it was not impressive enough that an angel appeared to the shepherds who were tending their flocks in the fields outside of Bethlehem, Luke then tells us that suddenly there appeared with this angel "a great company of the heavenly host." And we often picture wispy and gossamer angels.

The word "host" is actually a military term. It refers to the division of an "army." Imagine the shepherds looking up and seeing row upon row of angels—a magnificent military chorus proclaiming good news! As David says in Psalm 103:20, "Praise the LORD, you His angels, you mighty ones who do His bidding..."

This mighty military came not to wage war but to announce the birth of a baby—the Prince of Peace. God has not sent a powerful angel army to conquer sin, death and the devil. He sent His Son. He will carry our fight to the cross and by His blood win for us forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. As Luther wrote, "For us fights the Valiant One, whom God Himself elected. Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is. Of Sabaoth Lord (Lord of heavenly armies)." If you hear the voices of a military chorus this Advent, imagine what the shepherds must have seen and heard that night.

By Rev. David Tannahill

Prayer

*Thank you for the mighty army of angels which appeared and rejoiced over the birth of my Savior. Keep watch over the men and women of our armed forces, who serve in fields far from home this season, as they too rejoice over this good news. Amen.*

December 24

Luke 2:14

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!"

I find it interesting to watch how people respond as they open the gifts given to them. Depending on the gift and how it was received, one may witness anything from ecstatic joy to complete indifference, from confusion to amazement, from thankfulness to contempt. You never really know how someone is going to respond to a gift given to them, even one given in love with heartfelt care and concern.

I also find it interesting to see how people respond to the good news of Jesus Christ. Out of loving care and concern for us, our heavenly Father sent the gift of His Son into the world so that we might be saved from the condemnation of our sins. Share this with someone, tell them that this divine gift is for them, and see how they react. Sadly, too many people respond with indifference or contempt. Too many others are confused as Christmas is watered down into "happy holidays."

However, with those who receive this good news and believe, it is truly delightful to see them respond to God's greatest gift. They are amazed that such love and kindness is poured out to them. They are thankful for the grace and mercy they have been given. They respond with ecstatic joy at the hope and peace that is now theirs.

The angels knew the truth and they sang the praises of God, "Glory to God in the highest." We who know the truth join in with that celestial choir in our carols, our hymns, our liturgy, but most importantly, in our hearts. For us it is not a seasonal phrase, but a praise that is on our lips for all of our days, "Glory to God in the highest."

By Rev. Richard Gizynski

Prayer

*Father, you have shown us immeasurable love in your Son, Jesus. May we be ever thankful at this amazing gift. May we ever bring you the highest glory and praise as we live lives filled with peace, hope and joy throughout this season and the whole year. Amen.*