

What child is this?

The Child to Believe in!

Believe in the Bared Arm Baby

Isaiah 52:7–10 (NIV) ⁷ How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!” ⁸ Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the Lord returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. ⁹ Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. ¹⁰ The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

I like Christmas decorations. I like the colors and sparkles. There are so many to choose from: little footballs with your favorite football team’s logo and colors, glass balls designed like the antique decorations on my grandma’s tree, even your favorite cartoon or comic book characters. I like the wall hangings with different sayings, especially those that bring to mind Christmas carols or Christmas stories. “Joy to the World!” “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.” One decoration has made me stop and think. I’ve seen it many times in many different styles. Sometimes it is painted in gold, sometimes sparkly. Sometimes it was on a wall hanging, other times I saw it on tree ornaments and even on Christmas cards. It simply says, “Believe.”

Believe? Believe what? Believe, by itself, is nothing. We need to Believe in something. There are a lot of things a person could Believe at Christmas time. We could Believe...in the Christmas spirit. There’s a lot of it out there. It seems that the Christmas spirit is inseparably tied to the shopping season and is motivated by all the commercials and ads that are everywhere. If that’s true, there wasn’t as much Christmas spirit this year as there was last

year, because the shopping season was 7 days shorter than last year. The Christmas spirit doesn't last beyond December 25th, either. Once Christmas is over, everyone goes back to the way their lives were before.

We could Believe... in peace on earth. That's the first thing everyone has on their Christmas list, and it's a good one. Many of our service men and women won't be home with their families and friends over the Christmas holiday. Why? Because there isn't peace on earth. They have to serve in foreign countries all around the world, working hard to keep the peace. If we had peace on earth we wouldn't need soldiers to defend our country or keep peace in others. We wouldn't need police to put their lives on the line every day to serve and protect. We wouldn't have to lock our cars and our homes because there would be real peace. Maybe if we really try hard to Believe, it will happen. People have been trying to do that for a long time. It hasn't happened yet.

Maybe we should Believe... in all the legends of Christmas! Santa Claus, Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, Frosty the Snowman. We read the stories. We watch classic shows on television, and we love to Believe in them. The only problem is, they only show up once a year, and really only in our books and TV shows. Once Christmas is over, they are gone. They can't help us with our finances or our homework.

That word Believe is empty. Without something real, something lasting, something powerful to Believe in, there's no reason to celebrate Christmas. There's no reason for a Christmas tree and piles of gifts around its base. There's no reason to gather at the table for Christmas dinner. There's no hope for those struggling with depression and loneliness that overwhelm them at Christmas. We stand around our trees, sing beautiful Christmas carols and songs, but without something or someone real to Believe in, we can't get rid of all the ugliness and sin that fills our world.

Maybe we should Believe in ourselves. We aren't any better than the rest of the world. If we kept a list of sins, what would ours look like? Would we be Naughty, or Nice? We'd like to think that we're Nice, but our sins say otherwise. How much peace have we contributed to the Christmas season? No arguments? No fights? No muttering under our breath like Scrooge about someone else's Christmas joy? How have we talked about others? Have we looked for ways to defend their good name, or have we spent more time complaining behind their backs and letting everyone else know what a terrible thing they did?

If we Believe in ourselves this Christmas, the only thing we can say is that we have made a mess of everything—our personal lives, our families, our church family, our jobs, even our world. I can only Believe... what Isaiah wrote in chapter 3. **“Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them! They will be paid back for what their hands have done.”** (Isaiah 3:11 NIV). I have to Believe... that I have sinned and have earned nothing from God except a life filled with disaster and an eternity apart from him.

Here's what makes Christmas “the most wonderful time of the year.” God gave us something to Believe in. Birthdays are special. When my son Jacob was born on March 4, 1994, it was good news. I remember looking at little hands and feet that had punched and kicked

mom awake on so many nights. His little life consumed our thoughts and prayers. But Jacob was just a baby. The world will not stop working March 4, 2022 to celebrate his 28th birthday. History will not be divided by the day he came into this world. No one will say, “I was born in the year 30 After Jacob.” “Oh, I was born in 42 - “42 years Before Jacob.” Babies are amazing gifts of God, but their births don’t give us something to Believe.

The birth of Jesus does, and for good reason. Isaiah tells us why. **“The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God”** (Isaiah 52:10 NIV). God’s people expected him to do that in a powerful, miraculous way, just as he had done in the past. He had laid bare his holy arm—rolled up his sleeves to go to work—in front of Pharaoh’s army, dividing the Red Sea and allowing his people to cross on dry land. He had laid bare his holy arm for Joshua, making the sun stand still in the sky for an entire day. On Sunday we heard him promise to lay bare his arm for wicked King Ahaz, giving him the promise that a virgin would conceive and give birth to a son called Immanuel—God with us.

When God finally laid bare his arm in the sight of all nations, it didn’t look like much. A baby arm is beautiful because the skin is so soft and smooth, untouched by sun and wind, no wrinkles, no blemishes. It is beautiful, but not powerful. The most that baby arm can do is grasp dad’s finger or tangle its fingers in mom’s hair and pull. It is just a bare armed baby. Look again. The LORD has laid bare his holy arm. The child cradled in Mary’s arms, the baby entrusted to Joseph for safekeeping, this newborn is God’s own Son. He is prepared to do battle with all of our enemies. He comes to save.

Believe... in this bared arm baby. Believe!—Sin has made our lives miserable, but this bared arm baby is more powerful than we could ever imagine. Isaiah said, **“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”** (Isaiah 52:7 NIV). Doesn’t that sound familiar? 700 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah echoed the angel’s message. Remember? **“But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today ... a Savior has been born to you’”** (Luke 2:10–11 NIV).

Don’t miss those little words that heaven and earth cannot contain. **“For all the people...born to you.”** So if you’ve been to jail, I have some good news. If you’ve failed as a parent, I have some good news. If you are struggling with an addiction, I have good news. If you have surprised yourself with your sins, I have good news. If this Christmas season has been too crazy with stress and the hustle and bustle of the season, I have good news. Believe... this bared arm baby was born to save us. Not a teacher to tell us what to do. Not an example to show us what to do. Not a coach to inspire us to do great things. He is a bared arm baby who is our Savior from what we’ve done. A rescuer from what we’ve said. A forgiver for who we’ve been. You see, all that really matters in life is what we put between the letter “s” and the letter “n”. Sometimes we think of me, myself, and put “I” there and we “s-i-n”. But God looked down,

backspaced our vowel and typed an “o”. S-o-n. God’s Son, born for us. God’s Son, who has changed our lives. Believe... in this bared arm baby!

I love Christmas music. I love the gentle strains of a piano playing familiar Christmas carols. I love the powerful voices of a choir singing Handel’s “And the Glory of the Lord” from his *Messiah*. I love hearing Nat King Cole croon *The Christmas Song*. But best of all, on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, I love to sing them myself. I remember singing them as a child, but it’s more than nostalgia. The songs we sing express the truth that we Believe... in this bared arm baby. He is the reason to celebrate at Christmas.

Isaiah included Christmas songs in his prophecy: **“Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem”** (Isaiah 52:9 NIV). Our songs are more than a background soundtrack for the Christmas season playing incessantly in the stores. These songs are a statement of what we Believe. **“Joy to the world, the Lord has come!”** (CW 62). **“Joy, oh, joy beyond all gladness, Christ has done away with sadness! Hence all sorrow and repining, For the Sun of grace is shining!”** (CW 45). **“Can I, will I forget how Love was born, and burned Its way into my heart unasked, unforced, unearned, To die, to live, and not alone for me, To die, to live, and not alone for me?”** (CW 54). **“Oh, come, all ye faithful, Joyful and triumphant, Oh, come ye, oh, come ye to Bethlehem; Come and behold him, Born the King of angels. Oh, come, let us adore him, Oh, come, let us adore him, Oh, come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.”** (CW 55).

We Believe... in this bared arm baby who came to save us. He came to rescue us from our sins. He came to bring real peace between God and us. He came to take away loneliness and fear. He was born to save us. He gives us something to Believe! Amen!

To God alone the glory! Pastor Jon Brohn