

## Ten Fingers and Ten Toes

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Picture a couple in the delivery room of a hospital—excited, but a little scared, too: timing, and breathing and counting together. **When our** children were born I had to stay in a waiting room—or in one case, in the hallway just outside the delivery room. I envy my sons, who have been present to share the experience with their wives.

Either way, there is an air of anxious anticipation. Sometimes the process is delayed, and the mood becomes anxious. But in most cases, the hour comes, and we finally hear the words we've been **waiting for**: "He's got ten fingers and ten toes"—and we know the baby is normal and well. Ten Fingers and Ten Toes.

Our scripture this morning is about a birth:

(LUKE 2:1-7 KJV) *And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. <sup>2</sup>(And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup>And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. <sup>4</sup>And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (be-*

*cause he was of the house and lineage of David:)* <sup>5</sup>*To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. <sup>6</sup>And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. <sup>7</sup>And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.*

You know, I'm not sure we really think of Jesus as a **real baby**: ten fingers and ten toes. Maybe he seems more like a fairy tale or a Dr. Seuss character.

I remember Erma Fox, at the church I served as student pastor. Erma was such a good children's Sunday School teacher. It was her gift and she saw it as her calling. She had been teaching two and three-year-olds for over thirty years. She prepared early every week: read her lesson on Monday, gathered her materials on Tuesday, and you could always find her at the church on Friday afternoon, setting up her room for Sunday morning.

During Advent one year Erma set up a nativity area in a corner of her room, with a life-size doll in the manger. She wanted the children to play with the doll—to experience the baby Jesus as real; only, it was she who did the learning.

On Sunday Craig, our eldest, was playing with the doll: "Baby Jesus taking a nap." "Baby Jesus wake up." "Uh-oh, Baby Jesus got a dirty diaper."

When she told us about it later Erma said, "My first impulse was to say, 'No, no!' But I realized, 'Well... if he was a real baby...'"

I remember the words of a solo in a cantata we sang when we were serving the church at Pine Bluff: "The hands of God that formed the world from nothing, will touch the earth with fingers of a child." And later in that same song: "Great

love of God, your heart beats warm and tender within the tiny body of this boy."

It would really come home to me as I'd watch my grandchildren sleeping in my arms—or wipe the pudding from their drooling chins—or listen to their laughter as daddy swung them 'round and 'round, or to their crying when Mommy would drive away. I wonder if Mary and Joseph noted these things, too. Real baby—ten fingers—ten toes...

There's something so very **special about** the hands of a child—ten fingers that hold one adult finger like you and I hold a baseball bat, or a golf club.

**And the feet** of a child: ten toes... Do you supposed Mary played "This little piggy went to market?" Do you supposed baby Jesus giggled with delight as his mother tickled his tiny toes?

Ten fingers and ten toes; hands that learned to handle a hammer and a saw—and grew strong and callused—real fingers, with dirt under the fingernails—real feet that got sweaty and dirty as they walked the dusty Galileean roads.

Hands that brought sight to blind eyes; that touched a lame man and made him to walk again. Feet that walked on water.

Hands that took bread, and broke it, and poured wine—and washed the feet of his disciples. Feet that left footprints outside the city gate—leading up to a place called "Skull Hill". Hands and feet that were nailed to a cross—real hands and feet, that bled, and scarred.

The ancient Chalcedonian Creed says of Jesus, *"We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in **manhood**; truly God and truly man..."*

When I was growing up, and even after I began my ministry, I heard stories about people in the church—even preachers—who didn't believe in the divinity of Christ. I suppose there are some around. I've never met one. I've never heard anyone say, "I am a Christian; but I don't believe in his divinity."

But I have seen and heard many deny, by word or deed, his humanity.

- ✌ When we confess on Sunday that Jesus is savior of our souls, but do not live, at work or at home, Monday through Saturday, with him as Lord of our relationships and our jobs and our homes, we deny his humanity.
- ✌ When we affirm him as Lord of our personal morality, but do not live by his ethics in our relationships with others, and do not insist upon that same ethic and morality as a social standard, we deny his humanity.
- ✌ When we endorse him as Lord of our prayer life but not of our calendar,

we deny his humanity—and in the process we make our calendars our real Lord.

- ✌ When we discount our own value as persons—or as Christians—we deny his humanity. When we say, “I can’t follow him; after all, he’s the Son of God, and ‘I’m just human.’” Jesus was human; and he said, “All that I do, you will do; and greater things than I do, you will do.”

Jesus came, not only as “Son of God;” but also as “Son of Man”. He came not only to bring eternal life in the future; but also abundant life in the present. Jesus is not only Lord of heaven; he is also Lord of our world, which is why we pray every Sunday, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

And, above all else—even when he was a tiny baby in a manger—a real baby with ten fingers and ten toes—**even then**, he was Immanuel. Even then, **in him** God already was with us.

**A Christmas Prayer:** Holy God, thank you for Christmas. In a sense, it is your song of love to humanity.

It is the physical embodiment of your concern for humankind that was first expressed through the words of the prophets of old.

Then the song was heard through the promise made to a bewildered young woman who couldn’t fully comprehend what you had in store for her, or the world.

The meaning of your song of love for us became clearer through the crying voice of the baby in a manger. The song reached its crescendo in the sacrificial life of that baby who eventually died and rose from the grave for the forgiveness of the sins of the world.

Make us aware in this hour of the song. Help us remember some of the more important words—hope, peace, joy, and love—as we immerse ourselves in the holiday season. Thank you for the song.

Amen.

~ Adapted from a prayer by Terrell Carter

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