

# Simple Faith

◆ **December 24** ◆  
(Christmas Eve)

## “Seeing Christmas”

*Faith helps us see life more clearly*

Matthew 2:1-12; John 20:29; Hebrews 11:1

In every field of study, there are the “giants” of the industry, people who set the bar for others to achieve or who contribute to their field in significant ways. For example, in the NFL, these names might include the legendary Jim Brown, the 5’10” Walter Payton, and the modern era and maybe greatest quarterback of all time, Tom Brady. In the field of science, these great would most certainly include: Isaac Newton, Louis Pasteur, and Albert Einstein. In the music business, it has to be people like: Beethoven, Mozart, and Elvis.

But when it comes to Christianity, it gets a little tougher. The biblical list is long: Noah, Abraham, Daniel, Isaiah, David, Paul, and many others. Since the inception of the church in Acts, there have been historical figures that have taught much and endured much to give us the faith we cherish today. While there are many names, thinkers like Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Wesley, and C.S. Lewis undoubtedly make any list. However, if one does even a simple Google search on the greatest theologians of all time, one name always appears: it’s the name of Thomas Aquinas. Have you ever heard of him?

Thomas Aquinas an Italian theologian who lived in the 13th century A.D. He began his ecclesiastical teaching career at the age of 22 and received his doctorate by the age of 32. In fact, he is one of the few who have the legendary status of Doctor of the Church. But why was he so important? His magnum opus is a large volume of weighty work called the Summa Theologica. This serious and very heady work provides some of the best theological material the world has ever known—and at a time when the church needed it most. While Aquinas has many accolades to his credit, in a short and simple sentence I can summarize one of his greatest contributions. It was this: **he combined theological principles of faith with the philosophical principles of reason.** I realize on Christmas eve this may seem a bit heavy, but here’s why it is so significant: **he helped people more clearly understand and “see” God.** He took religious sentiment and gave it gravitas. He moved theology in his day—and ours—from the realm of subjectivism and gave it feet for everyday living. How successful was he? Many of the arguments Christians use today to explain God to unbelievers find their origin in his thinking. In all of his writings, he made one famous and startling statement. Maybe you have heard it before. It says this:

*“To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary.  
To one without faith, no explanation is possible.”*

What does this mean? Let me illustrate from the Christmas movie for this week.

*The movie is the very popular and high-grossing flick called “The Santa Clause.”<sup>1</sup> This 1994 Christmas comedy classic stars Tim Allen as Scott Calvin, an ordinary man who accidentally causes Santa Claus to fall from his roof on Christmas Eve. Per the instruction included in the dead Santa’s clothing, Scott Calvin as the slayer of Santa must replace him. Despite his reticence, Scott Calvin plays along. After ee and his young son, Charlie, finish the Christmas Eve deliveries, the reindeer return to the North Pole with the new Santa Clause. Scott learns that he must permanently become the new Santa and convince those he loves that he is indeed Father Christmas. Scott Calvin is mystified by this*

*nightmarish and wondrous experience. As he is getting ready to go to bed, a cute little 1,200-year-old elf named Judy brings him a cup of hot chocolate. Calvin bemoans his bewilderment to her at the North Pole and all he sees. He then sheepishly confesses to Judy that while he sees it (the North Pole), he just can't believe it. To which, elf Judy answers him with these profound words: "Seeing isn't believing; Believing is seeing."*

Can you hear whispers of St. Aquinas?

*"To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary.  
To one without faith, no explanation is possible."*

"*Seeing isn't believing; Believing is seeing.*" This quote not only applied to the characters in this wonderful film, but it's also a really powerful statement on life. St. Aquinas accurately identified that people couldn't be made to believe. No one can have faith forced on him or her. In fact, the Bible reveals to us that real faith is a spiritual gift, not a natural talent. Faith is trust. It's confidence in something unseen. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase." And maybe most importantly, faith is a form of vision, a vision for seeing a new way of living.

Let's look at it this way. Spiritual living is always living by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Faith is the glasses to help us see our world so that we can understand our place in the world according to the economy of God. Faith is the filter by which we understand all that happens to us. Hebrews 11:1 provides some clarity. From The Message Bible it reads:

"The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see."

When we practice Biblical faith, we know how to decipher the codes for living well. We learn to appreciate what is taking place in us, around us, and to us. And while we might not always fully comprehend the circumstances of our life, faith gives us the ability to act nobly, beautifully, and with purpose. Let me give you some examples.

#### **Example 1:**

I have a friend<sup>2</sup> who was diagnosed with breast cancer. She celebrated her victory over this cancer by ringing the victory bell at MD Anderson in October 2013. But then in December of 2016, the doctors announced the cancer had returned. In fact, it was now Stage 4 Metastatic Breast cancer. That's terminal cancer. In her case, the statistics give her 2-5 years to live. How would you see this event if it happened to you? Would you despair? Would you sell everything and travel the world? Would you go crazy and immerse yourself in radical ways of living for your last days on earth? (Dramatic pause) Or, would you rejoice? Would you let the faith vision order your steps? This is what my friend does. She saw this difficult life event as a tool allowed by God to help her be more robust in her faith and powerful in her witness. Rather than languishing in self-pity, she wrote a book to help others fighting breast cancer. She works with a group of women in a support group called BreastFriends, offering hope in Jesus to these women living in desperate places. She has written a beautiful song of faith documenting her trust in God and her commitment to pray always. **Without faith**, she wouldn't be able to see her world from an eternal lens. **But because of faith**, real and deep faith, she walks daily using her keen spiritual prescription to bless others and enjoy God. **This is what it means to believe and then to see.**

#### **Example 2:**

In Matthew's gospel, chapter 2 tells the story of the Magi following the star in search of the child. They arrive in Jerusalem and inquire for the location of this child who is to be the king of the Jews. The current king named Herod was disturbed. He saw a challenger, a usurper to his throne—and he was having none of it. Being a keen politician, Herod tells the Magi to go find this young king so that he may worship him, too. You know the story well: the Magi find baby Jesus and leave him gifts of worship. So here's my question:

why did these intelligent men leave their home, most likely in Persia, and travel almost 1,000 miles by camel to locate a single, little baby? Was it curiosity? Maybe. Was it because they needed some space from the missus and the kids? Maybe. I think they really made this spectacular journey because they believed the sign of the star was from God and it helped them see their way to Jesus. **This is what it means to believe and then to see.**

Example 3: Let's fast-forward to the end of the gospels. In John 20, the text presents the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to his disciples. The disciples tell Thomas, who was missing for the first appearance of Jesus, that they've actually seen the Lord. Thomas doesn't believe them. He then utters the now famous line, "unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." Thomas needed to see to believe. A week later, the disciples were in a room when Jesus comes and stands among them. Thomas sees and he now believes Jesus is resurrected. In verse 29, Jesus responds to Thomas:

"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

My friends, I look at you this beautiful Christmas Eve and you've not seen and yet you believe. The Spirit is at work in your heart in such a way as to empower you to worship him tonight. The Spirit is moving in your life so that you witness for him in the rhythms of your day-to-day life. Even with the scriptures in my hands, I can't explain why I stay true to him in the midst of persecution. I can't fully explain how I continue to believe when society dumps its negativism and nay saying on me. I can't fully explain how I continue to make radical decisions to live for him. I just know that by faith I see. It's that simple. I'm thankful for incredibly intelligent people like St. Thomas Aquinas who have helped me to possess a simple and clear faith. For me, this is what **it means to believe and then to see.**

What about you? Can you see?

1. 58 second clip from "The Santa Clause" on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8YxwloflvQ>
2. This is the testimony of Cindy West. She may be reached at [lucindawest@mac.com](mailto:lucindawest@mac.com) for more information. Story used by permission.