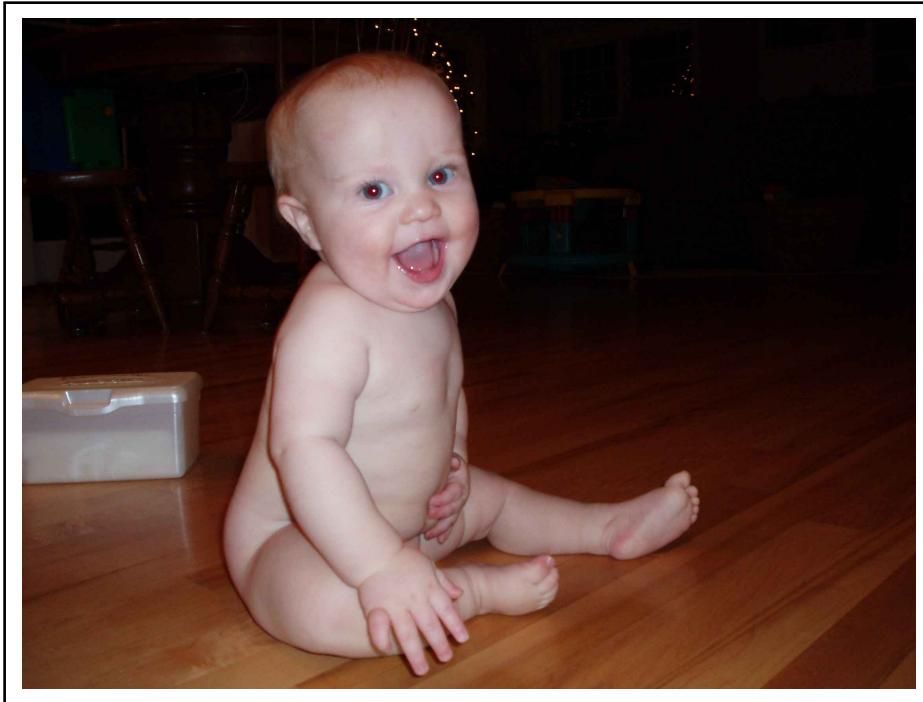


Christmas Greetings from Andrew Augustine



Me, gearing up for my grand escape after a diaper change...

Christmas... What a glorious holiday! A babe is born! I love babies! Wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, He is no ordinary baby. He is the King of heaven and earth. And fancy that -- He came to earth as a baby!

But wait a minute... Another child was born, much more recently. Nine and a half months ago, to be precise. This adorable cherub, the fourth child in his family, was much anticipated, much loved, and much appreciated. Nevertheless, the harried parents of four apparently never quite got around to spreading the good news via a formal birth announcement. I suppose this is what happens when you're Child Number Four. Disturbing, I know. This is what prompts little fellas like me to take matters into our own hands.

So, what can I tell you about Yours Truly? To my mother's great delight, I came into the world easily (and a couple days early to boot) on March 7, 2004. Unlike the troublemaker who preceded me, I arrived without subjecting Dear Mom to a c-section. Dad was downright giddy that the labor was short, for he claims his feet become sore during long labors at Mom's side. I was a people-pleaser from Day One.

Some folks call me Butterball. I cannot imagine why. I do love bananas, squash, and my morning rice cereal (disparagingly called "gruel" by my older siblings). Mmmmm! I also enjoy finding "snacks" in the oddest nooks and crannies of my rural abode. Strangely, cries of "gross" or "ewwwwww" tend to accompany the ritual removal of the tastiest morsels from my mouth. [Sigh.] Can't a guy live?

I keep busy these days destroying William's castles, eating the girls' doll shoes, and wreaking havoc in the "craft cupboard." I cannot imagine the boredom I'd encounter were it not for my three generous sibs providing fodder for my paths of destruction. Life is good.

Come visit me someday. You can squeeze my cheeks in person. I'd like that. Or, if you can't get out here, check me out on the web. My mom regularly posts photos of me on our family website (<http://www.leonefamily.org> User ID: leone Password: bucky). She's completely smitten with me. I'm not sure if it's my sloppy kisses or the fact that I simply won't let her escape into the next room without me.

Meanwhile, don't worry one iota about me and the no-birth-announcement thing. I'm coping just fine. Little Toot-Sweets Number Five, should he decide to enter the fray someday, can rally with ol' well-adjusted Number Four.

But I digress! I'm not the only babe in the world this Christmas, despite the impression I routinely create with my insistent wails. Another Baby deserves the glory. Indeed, on Christmas Eve, I'll observe my siblings as they place a miniature baby Jesus in His manger of straw, each straw representing an Advent good deed. With all my baby might, I'll listen on Christmas Eve as my Dear Dad, in Leone tradition, reads the passage from St. Luke, describing the birth of the Savior. Later still, I'll soak up the splendor of Midnight Mass, right through my closed little eyes, as one of my big sisters rocks me in the church pew. All the while, I'll be celebrating with my family, in my own baby way, the birth of the greatest Babe the world has ever known -- a Baby who, unlike me, needs no formal introduction.

Wishing you Christmas blessings straight from my jolly baby heart,

Andrew Augustine

