

Galatians 4:4-7

Christmas 1B Midweek + January 4, 2012
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
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Adopted

The Word of the Lord from Galatians 4: “⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

We know some folks who adopted a baby from overseas. It was no easy task. Adoption always involves lawyers, fees, inspections and paperwork anyway; international adoption takes this to a whole new level. If I recall correctly, the proceedings went far enough that the couple flew across the world and met their daughter-to-be, and then returned home to finalize the legalities. At that point, though, some political maneuver by one country led to wounded feelings by the other. Both sides sought to make a point, and in consequence, the other country halted all adoption proceedings and declared the United States unfit to receive its orphans. Just as this couple was ready to fly over and bring their daughter home, they were told they would have to wait indefinitely. The wait went several months, involving more paperwork and a United States senator or two. Finally, the ban was lifted, and the couple got to journey back across the world and bring their daughter home.

I can only imagine all of this from the child’s perspective. I know that she lived in an orphanage with a bunch of other children, and I know that she learned early on that she had been selected for adoption. She got to meet her parents-to-be; then for her, it was a matter of waiting, waiting for her to finally have a family and a home. If she knew that her new parents were about to arrive and then found that they had been delayed because of a squabble between the two nations, I’d imagine that made for some rough days as she had to wait once again. But unlike the orphans around her, she had hope. She knew it was only a matter of time.

I do know that when the parents arrived and met their daughter, they spent several days there in order to get an idea of their daughter’s homeland and culture; and wherever they went, their new daughter was a star. She was obviously an orphan being adopted by these Americans, and the people considered her *more than lucky*—they considered her a good luck charm. In fact, many people wanted to touch her as the family walked about the streets, because they were hoping that some of her good fortune would rub off on them.

So the girl went from orphan to minor celebrity, and she had very little to do with it. Her new parents were the ones who did all the work, paid the fees, consulted lawyers and contacted congressmen, booked the travel and made room in their home. They did the work—they fulfilled all the laws and paid the expenses, and she received a new life. She had to wait a while for all of it to come together, but she waited with hope that the day would come.

Our epistle begins, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons.” That’s how St. Paul sums up Christmas in Galatians. God sent forth His Son, born of a woman: again, the miracle of Christmas is that the eternal Son of God became flesh and was born of Mary. The purpose of the Incarnation is also clear in our epistle this night: “God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons.” The Incarnation is not a joyride for Jesus: He doesn’t become flesh like some mythical

Greek god in order to slum with the humans and see what it's like to have a body for a while. He comes with a distinct purpose.

He comes in the fullness of time. His birth is the best-planned ever, predestined from before the beginning of time. Mankind has known it was coming since Genesis 3, when God declared that the Seed of the woman would defeat the devil.

He is born under the law. He doesn't have to be: as the Son of God, Jesus is above the Law. The Law is necessary for Law-breakers, and Jesus keeps the Law perfectly. He is born under the Law to redeem those under the Law—that would be you, me and all nations. He does this actively and passively. He fulfills the Law actively by doing it—by obeying the Law perfectly. He's already doing this on the eighth day of His life, when He's circumcised in keeping with the Law: already as an infant, He sheds His blood to keep the Law in order to redeem you. He's already keeping the Law on the 40th day of His life, when Mary and Joseph bring Him to the temple, because the Law demands that the firstborn child be redeemed before God by sacrifice. Jesus doesn't have to be redeemed before God—but you do, so He keeps that Law for you, too. Throughout His life, Jesus does the work of fulfilling the Law on your behalf; it's the active part of His work of redemption.

He fulfills the Law passively, too: He suffers the consequences of it. The wages of sin is death, says the Law: sinners face God's wrath, judgment and hell for their sins. This Law must be fulfilled, too, so Jesus fulfills it: on the cross, He suffers God's wrath, judgment and hell for the sins of the world. That's the price of redemption for sinners born under the Law. As St. Paul says in Romans 8:3-4, "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

So why does Jesus do all of this? "So that we might receive adoption as sons." As far as faith goes, you were born an orphan—you were no child of God. You were lost; and worse than simply being an orphan, you were a slave to sin, enslaved to some false god or another (probably yourself and your sinful nature). That's a life with no hope whatsoever. That's a life that ends only in eternal death.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem you so that you might be adopted as a son. A son—a firstborn son, as we spoke of on Sunday, which means that you're an heir of the kingdom of God. You've gone from orphan without hope to one who can call the Almighty God "Abba," an intimate name for a father.

For your redemption, Jesus was born of Mary to pay the expenses and take care of the legalities: that's what the cross is all about. The price of your adoption was His own blood, and He paid it gladly to make you His child.

Having done the work and paid the price, Jesus then adopted you. That's your baptism, when He put His name on you and said, "You now belong to Me." Remember, when Jesus was baptized as one under the Law, His Father declared, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." The Bible makes clear that, in Holy Baptism, Jesus joins you to Himself, to His death and His resurrection. Therefore, God the Father looks on you and says, "You are My beloved son—for Jesus' sake, I am well-pleased with you."

You're adopted: you're a son of God and an heir of the kingdom of heaven. The Lord hasn't welcomed you in as a household servant or a tenant. You don't stay in His household because you do a good-enough job or because you pay your daily rent. You're in His household because you're now His child for Jesus' sake. You can be certain of your salvation, of God's favor for you. The only way you can no longer be a child of God is to run away from home, to reject His adoption and salvation.

The Law is fulfilled. The adoption is done. You're a son of God, an heir of the kingdom of heaven.

And you're still in a far country: you're not home yet. Your home is the kingdom of heaven, and you're still waiting to be picked up. But unlike the rest of the world out there, you wait with hope. You wait with hope because you know that your adoption has taken place, and it's only a matter of time until your Father shows up and takes you home. You wait with hope because He does not leave you alone in the meantime. When He adopted you in baptism, He sent you His Holy Spirit as a seal, a guarantee of His promise to you.

Until the time He takes you home, He visits you. The Son of God visits you with His body and blood to renew your adoption, to keep you in the one true hope that you are a son of God and an heir of heaven. He promises His faithfulness while you wait; and He assures you that nothing prevents Him from coming—He only delays so that more might hear His Gospel and receive the adoption as sons.

Let despair and hopelessness be gone! And let every Christian repent of any notion that his works have anything to do with his salvation. The truth is that Christ has done the work and paid the price so that you might be adopted as sons of God: and if sons, then heirs of the kingdom of heaven, because you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen