

Sermon for December 29, 2013 – Christmas 1

Galatians 4:4-7NKJV

Theme: Divine Adoption

1. The Son of God became a child of man so that
2. The children of men might become sons of God.

⁴ But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" ⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Gal 4:4-7 NKJV)

Have you ever read the story "Oliver Twist" or watched the movie about Little Orphan "Annie?" Both stories do an excellent job presenting the plight of orphans who are looking for love, but whom the world around them mistreats and uses to its own advantage. They need someone to save them from their miserable life. They need to be adopted and, in both cases, they were adopted by a wealthy benefactor.

Why am I mentioning these stories about orphans? Because the spiritual life of every believer is similar to that of Annie and Oliver. The sin we inherited from our first parents – Adam and Eve – has left us as spiritual orphans in a world that wants to take advantage of us. Outside of Christ, we had no hope of changing our situation. We longed to have a Father who would love us. Our greatest desire was to be part of a family – but there was no way we could change our situation.

But God the Father saw our plight. He saw how helpless and harassed we were. And even though we sinned against him, he loved us anyway. In consultation with His Son, He decided to rescue and adopt us as his dearly loved children – and this is exactly what we are. Let us learn how God did this, under the theme: **Divine Adoption:** 1) *The Son of God became a child of man so that* 2) *the children of men might become sons of God.*

Part One: The Son of God became a child of man

Our sermon text is taken from Paul's letter to the Christians in Galatia. Here's the situation: Some false teachers had infiltrated this congregation after Paul left. They told the people that, since the Jews are God's children, it's important for all gentile Christians to keep the ceremonial laws God gave the Jews if they also wanted to be considered God's children and be saved. In other words, they pointed the Christians in Galatia to themselves instead of Christ for salvation.

The Apostle Paul wrote a very strong letter opposing this false teaching. Now, while it was certainly true that God considered the Old Testament believers his children, it was certainly NOT because they had kept the law. It was because they believed God's promise to send a Savior. The Scriptures are clear: Old Testament ceremonial laws did not free the Israelites, but pointed to their need for salvation. Old Testament believers – like the Gentiles – were by nature slaves to sin. (cf. Galatians 4:1) They lived their life looking forward to the day God would fulfill his promise and adopt them.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Do not ever think that you can earn God's love and favor. Just as an orphan or a slave can do nothing to be adopted into a family, so we can do nothing as well. By nature we are totally corrupt and separated from God. Like the character Oliver Twist in Charles Dickens famous novel, we are

harassed and helpless. We only run from one bad state of affairs to another. We can do nothing to better our situation. Only God could do something; and He did!.

We read: *When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.*

God always had His watchful eye on us. He loved us even though we did nothing to deserve it. He loved us so much that He determined to save us when the time was right.

And when the time was right, He sent His Son. The divine Son of God took on human flesh and blood in the womb of a woman. He did this so that He could be born under the law – subject to all its requirements. He did this so that he could redeem us – that is buy us back for God.

When playing woman's softball, a team cannot call on a male MLB player to pinch hit. Why not? Because He is a man. The first rule of women's soft ball is that only women can play. In a similar way, God himself could not be our substitute. Why not? Because He is God and therefore not subject to God's law like we are. But God wanted to save us, so what did He do? He became man. The Lawgiver subjected himself to all the Laws He gave. He became a human being like us. He did this so that He would be able to be our substitute.

As our substitute, Jesus was able to do something that no other human could possibly do: he was able to keep God's law perfectly for us. Make no mistake – God demands perfection. Only a perfect person is allowed to be a member of God's family. We are imperfect. Using a baseball analogy again, every time we come up to the plate of God's law, we strike out. But Jesus, our pinch hitter, kept God's law perfectly for us. He knocked it out of the park so as to win the victory over the devil for us.

But that's not the only thing Jesus did. The debt our sins had incurred had to be paid for – a debt none of us were able to pay. So what did Jesus do? He paid our debt for us. How? The small Catechism puts it this way: *He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.*

Jesus – the Son of God – became a son of man so that, through his work for us, we might be adopted as sons and daughters of God.

Part Two: That the children of men might become sons of God.

When a child is adopted into a family, that child has every right and responsibility as if it were born into that family. Legally speaking, there is no difference between a child who was naturally born in the family and the child that was adopted.

Think about what this means for us, who have been adopted by God through faith in Christ Jesus: God considers us no different than Jesus, His Son.

⁶ *And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"* This is the first blessing God has poured upon us: He has given us His Spirit.

Do you remember the account of Jesus' baptism? We read that *the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am*

well pleased." (Luke 3:22 NKJV). Well, guess what happened when we were baptized? That same Spirit that was poured out on Jesus was poured out on us. The declaration God made at Jesus' baptism was made at ours. He declared in heaven: "You are my son. You are my daughter. I am well pleased with you because you have been clothed with my Son's righteousness. I have adopted you into my family. I love you dearly – as much as I love Jesus himself. Want proof? Look, I asked my son Jesus to suffer and die so that I could save you and adopt you as my very own."

God has sent the Holy Spirit to create and strengthen faith in our hearts. His Spirit marks us as children of God. His Spirit enables us to come to the LORD in prayer, as little children run up to their father – asking for help and being comforted with His presence.

What a privilege, dear Christian! You are a child of God all because Jesus became a son of man – this is the joy of Christmas. What a comfort it is that I can be like a little child and call the almighty God my Papa, my Daddy with the dearest affection and confidence that only a little child can express to his Daddy. What joy there is in knowing that, no matter what I face in life, my heavenly Father is watching out for me. I was once a spiritual orphan – harassed and helpless, but God himself adopted me. He promises to work in all things for my eternal good. His promises protect me from anything that threatens my soul. He promises that He will never withdraw his love from me

St. Paul continues: *Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*

Think about what this means – being an heir of God. It means whatever God has given to Jesus, his Son, Jesus will also share with us. Consider this: God the Father has given Jesus the honor of being judge over all at the end of time. But guess who also has this honor? Believers do because of their relationship with Christ – as St. Paul says: *Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? . . . ³ Do you not know that we shall judge angels?* (1Co 6:2-3 NKJV)

The glory that Jesus received from God He shares with us – the greatest glory being that of eternal life with His Father in paradise. Jesus considers all who believe Him His dearly loved family – as He demonstrated when He said: *"Who is My mother, or My brothers?" ³⁴ And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers!" ³⁵ "For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."* (Mar 3:33-35 NKJV)

Fellow brothers and sisters of Christ – children of the Almighty God: rejoice in the love your Father has for you and don't ever doubt it. The Son of God became a child of man so that the children of men might become the sons and daughters of God. Live as the child God adopted you to be and honor God with a life of love and good works – thanking him for His great salvation. Amen.