



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

First Sunday of Christmas (B) – Galatians 4:4-7

Focus: *Adopted as God's Own Children*

word of life

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son ... so that we might receive adoption as children.” Galatians 4:4-5 (NRSV)

Read Galatians 4:4-7

Paul was writing to a church simmering in controversy. His own message of the Gospel was being challenged. Paul's emphasis on the unmerited grace of God was being interpreted by some as dismissing the law – the guidelines and requirements to be followed to be faithful to God. These members of the Galatian faith community believed following the Jewish law was necessary in order to be a faithful Christian. The community was divided between Gentiles and those of the Jewish tradition. The controversy was so challenging because it was based on a religious piety – to be a “true” Christian requires following the laws of the Old Testament.

1. *What are some issues which divide the church today?*
2. *Are there guidelines and requirements necessary to be a faithful follower of Christ?*

Paul's response is a passionate letter to the Galatians. He uses all resources available – personal experience (Gal 1:11-23), biblical interpretation of the Old Testament (Gal 3:6), chastisement, personal appeal, and passion (Gal 1:6-10, 3:1) – to draw the faithful back to the core of the Gospel message. The law, while helpful and instructive, will not save. It rests on achievement and merit; and left to our own actions, we all fall short. But in the coming of Christ, the law is completely fulfilled. In baptism, the believer is joined to Christ, and a new relationship with God is established – a relationship not based on our observance of the law or on our merit, but on our connection to Christ.

3. *Why is it so difficult to accept the free and unmerited love and grace of God?*

Paul points to the birth of Jesus as the defining moment of divine grace. “When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those under the law.” (Gal 4:4) It is in Christ, not in our own works, that salvation is found. It's all free, unmerited grace.

Through the gift of this grace, we experience a new relationship with God. We receive adoption as children of God. (Gal 4:5) Adoption is completely a gift; there is no merit earned by the one adopted. And as adopted children, we receive the inheritance of an heir. We receive forgiveness and salvation.

4. *What does it mean to know that you are a child of God?*
5. *What gifts do we receive as God's children?*

We also receive as God's children the Spirit of Jesus. This Spirit empowers us to know God intimately as a loving and dear parent. We can address God as “Abba, Father.” (Galatians 4:6) “Abba” is a term of intimacy, perhaps better translated, “Daddy.” It implies a close relationship of trust and care.

6. *What is the significance of being able to address God as “Abba”?*

The use of the first person plural “we” in vs. 5 leads many biblical scholars to believe these verses from Galatians are early creedal formulations and confessional statements. The term translated “crying” in vs. 6 was often used in worship settings to indicate a shout of unity in mind and belief.

The message is clear: Christ was born as a child so that we are adopted as children of God and heirs of God's grace.

word among us

We are in the season of Christmas (which lasts until January 6 – the Epiphany). The days of Christmas can be a time of reflection on what the birth we celebrate means for the world and for us individually.

The verses for today’s reading from Galatians boldly proclaim that the birth of Jesus brings about our adoption as children of God.

In October, 2011 Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple and the force behind the iPhone and iPad, died of cancer. In a commencement speech he gave prior to his death, he spoke of his adoption. He recalled being told as a child by a friend that being put up for adoption meant that he was abandoned and unwanted. He remembered going home in tears visibly upset. As he told his adoptive parents the reason for his tears, they assured him that what his friend had said was not true; in fact, the truth was just the opposite. He was chosen by them to be their child. They went to great lengths to have him as a part of the family.

1. *What words or images come to mind when you hear the word “adoption”?*
2. *Are there experiences of adoption in your family or friends? Share them if you are comfortable doing so.*

“God sent his Son ... so that we might receive adoption as children.” (Galatians 4:4-5) What a wonderful image for us! We might feel abandoned and unwanted. Others might cause us to question who we are and what we are. But the good news of Christmas – the good news of the Gospel – is that because God came to us in Christ as the babe in Bethlehem, we are adopted as children of God. We can speak intimately to God as we would to a loving parent. Our acceptance and worth are not based on what we do or don’t do; they are based on what God has done in Christ.

3. *When did you realize you were part of God’s family?*
4. *How does it feel to know you are “part of the family” and you belong?*

God became a child so that we might be God’s children. This is the good news we celebrate at Christmas and every day of the year.

faith practice in daily life

Serve all people following the example of Jesus.

Our adoption as a child of God is sealed in our baptism. The baptismal liturgy proclaims this good news: “We are born children of a fallen humanity. In the waters of baptism, we are reborn children of God and inheritors of eternal life.” God has chosen us to be God’s own.

As chosen children, we are called to live out that relationship in service to others. As we live into our relationship as God’s children, we follow the example of Jesus.

5. *What does it mean to be “adopted by God”?*
6. *What do you hope to remember from this lesson?*

Prayer

Gracious God, we praise you for the gift of your Son Jesus; and we give you thanks that you have made us your children. Amen

last word

Begin and end each day with the words, “I am a child of God.”

Daily Faith Practices

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