

### What Child Is This? – Galatians 4:4-7

*What child is this who, laid to rest, On Mary's lap is sleeping? Whom angels greet With anthems sweet While shepherds watch are keeping? This, this is Christ the King, Whom shepherd guard and angels sing. Haste, haste to bring him laud, The babe, the Son of Mary!* Christmas is all about this baby whom we sing about in the first verse of the hymn *Away In A Manger*. And you know this already. But did you know that there are a lot of people who think Christmas is about something else? According to a survey done in 2015 by the Pew Research Center, 51% of Americans celebrate Christmas because it's a religious festival. But 32% celebrate it only because it's a cultural holiday. And after looking at other surveys over the past decade or so, those numbers are pretty consistent. There is a solid third of Americans who celebrate Christmas but leave Christ out of it.

I give thanks to God that we rightly focus on Christ during Christmas and sing hymns like *What Child Is This?* Because the truths of Christmas Eve play on in our lives. We treasure the birth of God's Son who would come to save us from our sins. And it is here in Paul's letter to the Galatians, that we see what child this is and why we rejoice at Christmas time so much.

Paul begins our verses for this morning by writing “**But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.**” It was in Bethlehem on the first Christmas when the time had fully come when God sent his Son to be born of the Virgin Mary. And the reason Jesus was born was for the singular purpose to redeem us so that we might receive the full rights of sons and daughters. This is such a radical concept. When you look at all the other religions in the world, they either do one of two things. They either tell us how to live so we may reach up to the deity's level or they bring the deity down to our level by giving them flaws and petty emotions so they're really no different than us. But it is here where we see what makes Christianity so different – that Jesus took on human flesh to buy us back. To do this, he was born under God's moral law which is summed up in the 10 Commandments. Every human is under this law and is held accountable to it. And so Jesus came into the world on Christmas and placed himself under the same moral law that we are under. And he would keep it so that he could redeem us, that is buy us back, and give us the full rights of sons.

Does this seem too good to be true? Maybe it's because you realize how much you have failed to keep God's law. As our Catechism students learned this

past semester, the 10 Commandments sum up God's moral law and cover just about everything we do! You have the first 3 which talk about our relationship with God and the remaining 7 which are concerned about our dealings with each other. And God's moral law doesn't just contend itself with how we live, but also our thoughts and words. Have we kept the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment by trusting in God above all things – including our money and strength? Have we kept the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment by respecting God's name and gladly calling upon him in good times and bad? Have we kept the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment by willingly obeying the authorities God has placed over us for our good? Have we kept the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment by keeping our eyes off of other men and women so we can be 100% faithful to our spouses? These are just 5 of the 10 Commandments and already I know how badly we failed to live up to God's moral law. We have broken it beyond repair. And even when we try our hardest to live under God's moral law, we still can't do it.

And this is why Christianity is far more comforting than any other religion. Because it is all about Jesus who was born under this demanding law so that he could keep it and redeem us. What child is this? He is Christ the King, the Son of Mary, our redemption. He is the one who would buy us back, which is the definition of redemption, from our slavery to sin. As we already know from our abysmal track record with God's moral law, we are stuck in our slavery to sin. And there's no way we can stop sinning let alone make up for all the times we have broken God's law. And because of this, Jesus has come. He came to live and keep every part of God's law. He died on the cross with all of our sins of the times we broke God's moral law weighing him down. And so Jesus, the one who never broke God's moral law, suffered our punishment for breaking God's moral law. How Christ was abandoned by his own Father and suffered the full extent of God's anger for our sins. And he died a perfect and innocent death so that there is no price for us to pay anymore. This is how our Savior redeemed us and bought us back from our slavery to sin.

But it wasn't enough for Jesus to redeem us. He also has given us the full rights as God's sons and daughters! The original Greek word for this refers to a legal adoption. And I really enjoy the word picture behind this. When you adopt a child, it's a big deal. It's permanent, costs a pretty penny, and involves a lot of paperwork. If you stay within the US it can take around 12 months and, according to the *Creating a Family* organization, it costs around ~\$40,000 if you want to adopt an infant. And after adopting a child, they are legally yours as any biological child.

But as difficult and expensive it is to adopt a son or daughter, it is even more to be a son or daughter of God. There is no price that money can buy or humans can give. The price for God's adoption is the death of Jesus. And when Jesus died on the cross, he not only redeemed us from our slavery to sin, he also paid the price so that we may receive God's adoption and have the full rights of his sons and daughters.

One of the rights a son or daughter has is relationship with their parents. How would you describe a loving relationship between a father and their son or daughter? The child is open with their father and shares with them whatever is on their mind. The child knows that everything the father does is for their good. And the child knows they can go to their father at any time and he'll listen. This loving relationship is what we have with our Father in heaven.

We have this wonderful relationship because God has sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts so that we may believe and receive God's redemption and adoption. We can call him **Abba** which is Aramaic for Daddy. And what better way to talk with our God and call him **Abba** than with the gift of prayer? For it is in this conversation with God where he talks to us through his Word that we can fully enjoy this relationship. Don't be afraid or shy to go to your Lord in prayer. He loves you so much he has redeemed and adopted you. Go to him and share whatever is on your mind whether it be the silliest thing or something really important. When you're in your lowest of lows and have hit rock bottom, go the Lord in prayer and trust in his power to lead you back to his light. When you're living on Easy Street, go the Lord in prayer and tell him "Thank you" for all his blessings. Know that when you do this, our Lord will always listen to us. He is never too busy governing the whole world so he can't listen to us. He is all-powerful and can easily keep this world together as he gives you all the attention you want when you pray to him. For this is just one of the full rights we have as God's sons and daughters.

Another right we have is that we are heirs of God's riches. All the blessings that God has to give, he has given to you and me as his sons and daughters. Not only can we go to him in prayer with the confidence of a child who is dearly loved by his father, we have God's forgiveness. Our Lord has adopted us into his heavenly family by sending the Holy Spirit to our hearts. Because he has redeemed us from our slavery to sin, Paul is correct to say to each of us **"You are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir."**

And our inheritance will not be taken away from us. For it is made sure by the one who has given it to us. Our redemption is a guarantee because our Savior died on the cross true man and true God. Our adoption is secure because our Lord has made us his beloved sons and daughters. Our prayers will be heard so we can confidently go to our loving Father as a child does to his father. These are just some of the full rights we get to enjoy on this side of heaven. But we will enjoy them and other blessings all the more when we pass away from this world and receive the heavenly inheritance in store for each of us.

Christmas is all about the child who was born in Bethlehem – the baby Jesus lying in a manger. You and I get this because we have received the Holy Spirit that God sent into our hearts. But there is a solid third of Americans who don't get that Christmas is about Christ. And even more who don't know what child this is and what he has done for them. So I encourage you, as you step out into a new year with your resolutions, to spread the word and tell others what child this is. He is Christ the King, the Son of Mary. He is our redemption. He has paid the price for our adoption into God's heavenly family. He has given us the confidence to go to God in prayer and say "**Abba, Father.**" And he has made us an heir of his eternal blessings. Amen.