

Second Sunday after Christmas – January 3, 2015
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Galatians 4:4-7

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5) to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. 6) Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." 7) So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Dear Christian Friends:

One for all and all for one! I think that was the motto of the three Musketeers. It was a promise they made to each other to stick together. Our Scripture lessons for today are all about promises. We heard how God promised Abraham that he would make an everlasting covenant with him. It was a promise that God would never abandon Abraham or his descendents – He'd stick together with them.

In our Gospel lesson Zechariah responded to a promise God made him through an angel. The angel had promised Zechariah a son who would prepare the way the coming of the Savior who would be a blessing for all of Abraham's descendents – as well as for all nations of the earth. At first Zechariah questioned and doubted God's promise. He was struck dumb – unable to speak until after his son was born. Upon giving his son the name John – as directed by the angel – Zechariah's tongue was loosed. He praised God for keeping the promises he had made to Abraham. This was a promise of salvation – a promise that God **would enable [his people] to serve him without fear 75) in holiness and righteousness before him all [their] days.**

Our sermon text confirms for us that God did indeed keep his promise of a Savior even though many generations had passed since he first made it.

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Theme: God Sent His Son

1. To be one with us under God's Law
2. To make us one with God through Christ

God sent his Son – that's what we celebrated this past Christmas. Sadly, we also heard once again about how Adam and Eve brought sin into the world by disobeying the God who created them. In response to their disobedience, we heard the Good News of God's promise to send the seed of a woman – a child – born of a woman who would defeat the Devil and provide a rescue from sin for all people.

Throughout the OT other prophets added more information explaining how that Savior would accomplish the task of reuniting God and man. Our text confirms that these prophecies were fulfilled when God sent his Son to be one with us under God's law.

Because of our sinful nature, we didn't even have the ability to request a Savior who would be one with us. In his grace, God sent his Son to become one of us. God's Son was miraculously born and placed in a manger because the motels and hotels in Bethlehem were filled.

The one who created all things and who established the standards and behaviors expected of all men now became a man. He became one of us. Sometimes high school students have opportunity to visit a college

campus so they can decide if they want to enroll there or not. They stay in the dorms, they eat cafeteria food, and visit classes. They are college students for a day – except that they are not responsible for completing any assignments or paying any tuition. That’s not the way it was for Jesus – he didn’t just become one of us for a day. He’s not like a modern day politician or ruler who volunteers to spend some time on the streets with the common folk and then quickly returns to his or her comfortable home after the photo op is over. Jesus was one of us for an entire lifetime. As one of us, he lived his life under the law of God that required perfection from all. He became one of us so that he might rescue us from our obligation to the law. He came to do our job for us. That included paying the penalty for our sins.

The reason he did this is so that we might be one with him. As our text says, he became one of us under the law to redeem us. That means he came to pay a price so that those who broke his law could become one with him. We cannot gaze upon the Babe of Bethlehem without realizing that his little hands would soon be pierced for our transgressions. This little child would grow and mature and ultimately he would be crushed for our iniquities. He would suffer the eternal punishment we deserved even though he himself was not a law breaker but a law keeper.

All this, God did for us when he sent his Son to be one with us so that we might receive the full rights of sons. We were born as slaves to sin and the Devil. We were not God’s sons by birth so Jesus came to bring us into this position of honor. Paul says that God’s Son came to give us the full rights of sons. In the Israelite household a child, had no more rights than a servant until a time set by his Father. At the specified time, the child would receive status as the designated heir – the full rights of a son. We have a similar situation in our way of dealing with our children. We speak of children as minors until they reach the age of 18 or possibly 21. Often parents appoint a guardian to watch over these minor children and their “estate” until they come of age.

While God could have sent his son to bring us into his family in a probationary way as a minor child who would have to somehow to earn the status of heirs -- he didn’t do it that way. He sent his son to be one with us under the law to make us one with him through Christ. Now the time our heavenly has set has come and we are his Sons. Through Christ we have the status of God’s children who can approach him with full confidence and comfort.

Our text now addresses us as Sons of God and tells us what it means to us that we now have been given this status.

Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." 7) So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Children don’t have to earn a place in the family. That’s one of the lessons Paul wanted to impress upon the Jewish people. As long as someone insists on trying to earn a place in God’s family by keeping the law for himself, he would remain a slave to that law. Such a person would be obligated to keep the entire law without a single misstep or be punished. The Jewish people at Paul’s time were especially prone to committing the error of thinking that they could be saved by following the Law. There are also those today who call themselves believers but who want to go back to using the law in an unhealthy manner. They use it not to understand their sins but to determine how to become a Christian. These people are ignoring the fact that the Law only shows sin and condemns sin it has no power to save.

The other group of people that Paul would have been addressing in this text would have had a Gentile background. If these people continued to turn back to the miserable principals they followed before they came to faith in Christ, they too would be turning their back on their status as sons and becoming slaves to the basic principals of the world which offered them no lasting or eternal freedoms.

Turning our back on Christ to do something by ourselves to earn a place in God's family or turning our back on Christ to live as unbelievers do deprives a person of the blessings that would be in store for those who are heirs according to the promise.

Christ, by redeeming us from the law, makes it possible for us to live under his grace. We are free from the no-win situation of trying to make ourselves acceptable to God. We are already acceptable to him in Christ. We are free from pretending that we are God's children by ignoring or excusing our sins. We are his perfect children in Christ our Redeemer.

All who live by faith in the Son of God enjoy this full status as sons of God. When God's Spirit enters our hearts to bring us faith in Christ, he enables us to take advantage of our status as God's child. He enables us to call out to God in the same way a little child would call out to his or her dad. The little Hebrew children would call their fathers Abba – in the same way our children use the word Dad or Daddy.

Abba – give me a drink of water the Hebrew child would say confident that his loving father would satisfy his need. Abba, hold my hand the child might say when frightened. That's the confidence we can have a children of the heavenly Father who have been given the full status of sons in his family.

We can bring our needs and our fears to him and he will satisfy and remove them. (Romans 8:32) **He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?**

What a wonderful way to describe our status as sons – there is nothing in the household of God that is off limits to us. Because you and I enjoy the full rights of sons already at this time, we can look forward to an inheritance from our heavenly father. The Apostle Peter encourages us with these words: (1 Peter 1:3-4) **Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4) and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.**

We are heirs together with Christ. Christ Jesus God's own Son now lives in glory in heaven. Although our focus during the Christmas season might be on the lowly manger – we can't ignore the glory which he enjoys following his suffering and cross.

It was love that compelled Christ to suffer and die on the cross so that we might be one with God. Before Jesus' offered his life for us on the cross, he lovingly prayed these words which remind us of the reason God sent his son. (John 17:24) **"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."**

Our heavenly Father answers our prayers in some amazing ways. Sometimes when an athlete or entertainer receives an award, they allow a family member or a friend to share the moment with them by inviting them to observe the special ceremony where they will receive their award. It would have been a sufficient answer to Jesus' prayer if you and I would simply have been granted the right to be a spectator of Christ's glory in just such a fashion. However, the Father has seen fit to make us co-heirs with Christ. We will not just be spectators of his glory – we will share in his glory.

On the last day Christ (Philippians 3:21b) **will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.** Christ's joy will be our joy. We will receive robes of righteousness and a glorious crown of life. What a wonderful answer to our Savior's prayer that we would be able to see his glory.

We are able to enjoy all of this because God sent his son to make us one with him through Christ. Dear friends rejoice in the freedom which is yours! **You are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.** May we gladly listen to our heavenly Father's word, honor him with our lives, and glorify with our prayers and praises. Amen.