

JOIN THE HOLY FAMILY
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

GAL 4:4-7
DEC 28, 2014

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

It is not an uncommon story that
 a young girl gets pregnant before she is married.
 She has fiancée but both are too poor to really afford a child.
 So after the birth there is an adoption.
But in this story there is a unique twist.
 Jesus is the one born to the poor young girl
 but instead of him being adopted as a result,
 All of us are the ones adopted into his family.
 so that we poor sinners who are slaves to sin
 inherit a new, godly way of life.
We often picture the holy family as Mary, Joseph and Jesus
 but Paul here pictures the Holy Family as
 Father, Son & Holy Spirit and all of us as God's children
because....

JESUS IS BORN TO JOIN US UNDER THE LAW
THE FATHER ADOPTS US AS SONS AND HEIRS
THE SPIRIT FREES US TO LIVE AS SONS.

JESUS IS BORN TO JOIN US UNDER THE LAW

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law,

Every year there is batch of movies that come out right at Christmas with hope families with vacation time will watch them together.
 Some include something in the story related to Christmas.
 One of these movies this year is remake of story of orphan Annie.
 I don't know if the movie includes an reference to Christmas
 but story has similarities to Paul's story of Christmas here.
Little Annie is waiting for the time her parents will come back for her.
 Meanwhile, she is a ward of the state.
 Legal system dictates who is in charge. She is under law.
 It is a hard knock life for her and those with her.
 A life that depends on following rules & working for all you get.

Until a rich benefactor comes into her life
and decides to care for her without her deserving it.
and her whole life is transformed.
I haven't seen latest "Annie" movie and don't know
if she gets legally adopted at the end of it,
but Paul says that is what ends up happening to us.
In letter to Galatians, Paul points out that his Jewish readers
were like children in foster care until Jesus came.
Their lives were controlled by the law in the Old Testament.
But, he says, his gentile readers also had a legalistic religion
based on what working to get what they deserved.
This is the natural born religion of every human mind.
It is a hard knock life because you get what you deserve.
Everything depends on how good you are.
And as much as we would like to think we are good enough,
when we are honest with ourselves, it is hard to believe
there is someone out there: God, who truly loves us.
This is why we make it such a hard knock life in this world,
because, even while we are trying to act and look good,
we assume nothing is really given us for free
and so we live like we are all looking out for ourselves.
But now, Paul says, Jesus has been born under the law with us,
he went through legal system to redeem us, make us his own.
When time came that God's plan was fully developed,
he used Roman law of census to fulfill his plan for his birth.
Today's Gospel emphasizes how from the time he was a baby,
Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of Jewish ceremonial law.
Ultimately he took our place in submitting to the law
that the wages of sin is death.
Now that he has paid the price, we belong to him,
not as slaves but as dear children.

THE FATHER ADOPTS US AS SONS AND HEIRS

so that we might receive adoption as sons⁷ So you are no longer a
slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

In new movie, Annie, it is her own charm that wins over
Mr. Stacks who first just wants to make himself look good.
This is where analogy breaks down.
In reality, God is the one looks on us as good by his grace
and wins us over with unconditional love.
This is more like another adoption story you may have heard.
Grace & Matthew Huang are Asian couple from US just released
from of being under arrest in middle eastern country of Qatar.

They were arrested because they had adopted 3 African children
and one had died, possibly as result of eating disorder
which is not that uncommon for children
who have experienced poverty and starvation.

They were under suspicion in Qatar from first because that culture,
which doesn't believe in legal adoption in first place,
couldn't see why anyone would adopt children not like them.
and so, in words of Qatar government, were ugly.
So they assumed, especially when the one girl died,
they must be planning to kill them and harvest their organs,
so they were accused of starving the little girl to death.

Contrary to the ways of the world where we live,
God has adopted us, who are very different from him,
in spite of the fact that our sins make us truly ugly.
out of his pure grace and compassion for us.
Instead of planning to kill us to use us for his purposes,
God's own son died to be our organ donor,
to give us his heart and his righteousness.

It is interesting that the wife of that Asian couple who adopted
and the female lead in movie Annie who advocates for good
are both named Grace.

This is what we call the reason for all God does for us.
It is by his free grace for Jesus' sake.

God has made us his children so that we might be his heirs,
receiving all that is his because Jesus died and left it to us.

This includes forgiveness of all our sins,
so that God, our loving father, gives us
all he sees we need in this world by his free grace
and also gives us eternal life in his heavenly home.

But he also does more. He transforms our lives here
to free us from the dysfunctional behavior of those
who are used to being in spiritual poverty and starving for love,
which makes it so hard to give and receive love
even when God so generously gives it to us.

THE SPIRIT FREES US TO LIVE AS SONS.

⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our
hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

I was talking to someone recently who is now retired.

Like many retired, he is as busy or busier now than before
but difference is he is not working because he has to
in order to make a living
but now that all of his needs are being provided for
he is doing things because he wants to.

This lifestyle of those for whom time has come when finally retired
is like what Paul says is ours now that time has fully come
when we are redeemed by Jesus.

We are freed from slavery to law, doing things because we have to
in an attempt to earn God's blessings or love

But now that these are fully provided for us
we can freely serve God and others out of love.

Jesus, God's son, did all that he did for us, not because he had to
but because he wanted to, out of love for his dear Father
and us, whom the Father loves.

This is what the Holy Spirit now pours out into our hearts.
so we also call God "Abba", Hebrew babies' word for "daddy".

This means we know he loves us and we love him.

When this spirit is given to us,

we are no longer burdened with all the things we need to do
but we think of how Jesus has done all we need
so that we now see all the things we want to do
in showing love for God and his love for others
because of what Jesus wants for us.

For many, time of waiting is over and Christmas has come & gone.

Children are now no longer trying to be good to deserve presents.
and many now have resolutions to be better in the new year.

For us, not exactly same: time of waiting is over and Jesus is here.

we don't need to try to be good to deserve God's gifts
but we are free to live better new lives.

JESUS IS BORN TO JOIN US UNDER THE LAW

So our situation has changed, we are no longer under law,
just doing what we have to do

and living a hard knock life of everyone trying to get
what we need for ourselves.

Jesus has fulfilled to law for us so that...

THE FATHER ADOPTS US AS SONS AND HEIRS

So our identity has changed. We are sons and heirs.

We are truly loved not because we are good & beautiful
but because God is.

Now we have all we need as heirs of him who died for us.

so THE SPIRIT FREES US TO LIVE AS SONS.

Our relationship with God has changed, we call him daddy,
confident he loves us dearly,

and doing what we do each day not because we have to
but because we want to show our love for him
and for those he loves.