

# Sermon Text for December 27, 2020

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

*Isaiah 7:11-14, Galatians 4:4-7*

*“It really happened”*

Welcome back to Christmas. It doesn't seem that long ago that we were gathered in this sanctuary as we welcomed Christmas in with our children's pageant and then with both of our candlelight services. There were so many people involved behind the scenes to make that happen. From Beth Feiler to Mark Feiler, to Bill Potter who has taken on the role now of our director so that different shots that we have are called by him. We have a team of audio people from Mark Feiler to Bill Payne, to Ron McVey who was here for two services on Christmas Eve. We have a team of media people from Tomas Avendano who was here for two services as well, to Leo Petrokonis, to Peter Witmer, to Dave and Debbie DiFranco, to Tim Ott, and a crew of camera people from Heidi Zook-Payne to Tomas Avendano to Mitchell Eby. I know I missed someone, but there was just an incredible sense of accomplishment after the services on Christmas Eve because it took so much to put them together. I really do have the easy part of the services.

But after it was all done we congratulated each other with a well done and looked back and we were able to say that it really happened, we were able to proclaim the Christmas Message that A Savior is born to us, to us has come salvation through the birth of Jesus Christ. I was pretty tired when I got home around 12:30 and helped with the stockings and we were in bed around 1:15am and fortunately we realized at 1:18 that the electricity went out. Remember Christmas Eve, the winter storm and all that rain that came down?

We have a sump pump in our basement and sometimes, rarely, but sometimes it comes on and I knew that if the electricity was out it would not come on. I went down to check on it in the dark and sure enough a bit of water was coming into the pump. So I stayed up until 3:30 with a pitcher bailing out the sump pump until the electricity came on. When I woke up on Christmas morning I was in that fog, you know the kind you get when you don't get enough sleep and I was thinking to myself, did last night really happen? Not only the services, but the bailing out of the sump pump by hand.

I am here to assure you today that it really happened. Meaning, Jesus was born, we have salvation, we have been given a new life in Christ. Both of our Scriptures for this morning point to the promises of God that were fulfilled, realized, accomplished last Thursday evening whether we are in a fog or not, Christ the Savior is born. Today in our Scriptures we answer the question

of why, to what end did it have to happen? Why has God gone to all of this trouble for us?

What is God's end game? Let's read.

## **READ**

It has been so nice to have all of my girls home for this time of the year. I know that so many of you do not have your children or any of your extended families and this year has been an especially unique, and for many, even sad year because so many of the traditions that we are used to are simply on hold this year. I am so incredibly proud of my girls and I don't hesitate to let people know what they are doing it and when I do tell them I am sure that there is a bit of a sinful pride as I recount what they are up to. I admit it. I love my girls. But for all that they have accomplished there is still one thing that makes me the most happy about my girls. These accomplished, confident, and self assured girls still call me daddy. I love it.

If you look at vs.6 in our reading in Galatians 4 you see that Paul uses this term Abba. Now, we should be very, very familiar with this term from our sermon series on the Lord's Prayers which seemed like a decade ago but which was only a year ago now. This Aramaic word was used consistently by Jesus to call his Father Daddy, Abba. This is how the Lord's prayer begins if you remember. As far as we can tell in Scripture Jesus was the only one who ever called God – "Abba, Daddy".

But you might say, "Well, he was the perfect Son of God. IF anyone had the right to call the Father Abba it was Jesus. But here in Galatians we hear the Why God did all that he did on Christmas, why all of the promises that we find in Isaiah and beyond have come true and realized in Jesus. The point that we see Paul making in Galatians is that Jesus is not the only one who can call God Abba. Who else can? You can. I can. Why? Because we have been adopted by God. We, who were in slavery to Sin and the law, are slaves no longer. God the Father has adopted us; he is now our Daddy, just as He is Jesus' Daddy, and we have a right to call him Abba.

And notice, this is not some future event...some carrot dangling in front of us so that if we live a life of obedience, then when we die and go to heaven then we will be God's children. No, it is right now! Look at vs.6. This is the why of the Gospel. This is what the Gospel points toward. This is why God went to the trouble of calling Abraham, through the family of David as we saw over Advent, to raise up a Son from within those people who lived perfectly and died and rose again...so that all who are clothed in his righteousness may become adopted sons and daughters, joint heirs with Jesus. This really happened. Everything Jesus has coming to Him as the perfect, obedient Son of the Father, you have that coming to you too! God wrote his living

will and said: “Everything I possess will be equally divided among all of my beloved children, forever.”

I want to speak to those of you who have been adopted. I know that adoption doesn't always have a fairy tale ending, but it strikes me as such a powerful illustration of God's love. You were no accident! Your parents chose you on purpose. A child can be created in the backseat of a car in a moment of mindless passion, but you who were adopted...your parents said: “We want you, on purpose, to be a part of our family.”

A friend of mine who is a pastor has a family in his church who adopted a girl who had been through 11 different foster homes, she had become hardened and cynical. Let's call her Sue. Then she landed with a family in his church who loved her, set boundaries, and were parents to her. She began to catch a glimpse of what it felt like to be a real daughter. When she turned 18, the age she would be on her own, she asked her new mother and father if they would adopt her. The answer was yes. The day they went to court to adopt her was a momentous one and one where even the judge said: “I've never done anything like this before!” In a moment she was one of the family, forever.

Sue died tragically and unexpectedly. At her service my friend preached on adoption, the wonderful illustration of God's love for us. He said: “For most of us, it is impossible to understand what the first 16 years of Sue's life were like. She didn't have parents that treasured her. She didn't have a father she could call Daddy. She didn't have a home she could call her own. She bounced from one foster home to another to another to another, eleven different ones. Can you imagine? How horrible to have no place to call your own, no one who wants to be your parent. No father to call Daddy.

It was at this point in the service where in the back of the church a woman stood up and began shouting at my friend and said something like: “I can't take it anymore. You call yourself Christians and say things like this. I can't sit here while you continue to tell these lies. I have Sue's birth mother right here next to me (and she asked her to stand up), and she loved Liz and I can't let you go on speaking like this.” I need to say that has never happened to me before. He responded very pastorally and she sat down and it ended fine.

But what is striking to me about this story is how close it is to the image we have in Galatians. The woman who interrupted my friend is like the voice of the Law crying out to us in protest. It claims to care, claims to want to provide a way into God's family, claims to have our best interests at heart, but the truth is, the law is not capable of bringing us into God's family. It can protest all it wants, it can stir up feelings of guilt and play on our sinful instincts to try

harder, to do good enough, in order to earn God's love. But it's not true. We do not become God's children by obeying the law, by keeping the rules. We become God's children because he adopts us out of His love and for the sake of His Son Jesus.

The human condition, as desperate as it may be, is not helpless before Him. God does not wait on humanity to instigate a reclamation project for itself and then rush to support it. Much like what we see in Isaiah where God tells the king to ask for a sign. The king clearly says no and God doesn't walk away, he says, fine, then I'm taking over. You will see that a son is born to a virgin and his name shall be Immanuel. God reclaims us himself on his own initiative.

Jesus was wholly human with all the consequences relating to that. Not only was he flesh and bone as we are, he lived his life in complete solidarity with us as we were under the law. He was vulnerable to all the conditions of human life which constantly threaten and unsettle: fear, loneliness, suffering, temptation, doubt, and ultimately even godforsakenness.

So here we find ourselves in Christmas, which really did happen, but we cannot overlook the fact that Christmas has to include Good Friday and Easter. The incarnation entails a realistic solidarity with the depths of the human situation in order to change the situation. The good news lies not only in the announcement that a baby is born, but that as John Calvin stated: "by putting the chains on himself, he takes them off the other.

That's what it means to have God as our Abba. Because we have Jesus as our brother. That's what it means to be adopted into God's family. Did you know that? That you have been adopted into God's family and that you are a joint-heir with Jesus. Not only have you been saved, you have been adopted into the family of God. You have a heavenly Abba and a heavenly big brother, Jesus. And everything he possesses belongs to you too. Amen.