

## ADOPTION

### *Sermon for Holy Name A- Lk2:15-21, Phil2:5-11*

LPC, 1/1/17

Rich pokes fun at me for browsing Facebook. Lord knows Facebook is no place to get your news, but I usually like to see what my friends have put up. In the last few weeks I have seen two home videos on the same theme: a young woman giving her stepfather his Christmas gift. In both cases what the young woman presents to the man who, though he did not physically sire the child has raised her as his own, is adoption papers.

Both these videos are obviously unstaged and extremely touching. The man takes the wrapped present grinning goofily, the way people do in all Christmas videos, but quickly becomes serious as he realizes he is holding legal papers. Several emotions then play across his face in quick succession: incomprehension, then shock, and then the man covers his face weeping as his family embraces him. There is literally not a dry eye in the house.

What a beautiful thing adoption is! Along with marriage, adoption is a public declaration where each person says, “You are mine and I am yours.” People adopted as infants of course don’t actually articulate these words at the time of adoption, but in various ways they learn them, literally by heart: “You are mine and I yours. We are blood.”

I talked about adoption a few weeks ago when we heard the story of Joseph recognizing Jesus as his own, even though, as the scripture describes, Joseph did not physically sire the child. Do you remember the mechanism by which Joseph did this? He named the child. Giving a child a name literally conveyed legal and moral rights and responsibilities. Naming a child was a most solemn act.

In Jewish practice, a male child was named at the time of his circumcision. Circumcision, of course, is the ancient sign of God’s indelible relationship with God’s people according the Abrahamic covenant. According to Jewish tradition, circumcision takes place on the eighth day after birth.

Is this ringing any bells? We always mark Jesus’ birth on December 25, the so-called “First Day of Christmas.” Today, January 1, is always the “Eighth Day of Christmas.” Therefore, besides being New Years’ Day and Eight-Maids-a-Milking, January 1 is always the Feast of the Circumcision, or, as it has come to be known, The Holy Name.

On this day, the son of Mary of Nazareth was given the name Jesus by Mary’s spouse Joseph. As the evangelist Luke makes clear: “This is the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.”

Our other scripture this morning, from Paul’s letter to the Philippians, waxes eloquent on the power of this Name Jesus is given. This passage expresses that even before Joseph gave Jesus this Name, legally claiming Jesus as his own, God had already named Jesus, claiming Jesus as God’s own Son.

As Paul quotes, God “gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.’

Scholars suspect this language is not original to Paul. In fact, many believe Paul is quoting from a hymn that was well-known at the time he wrote. This may well be the original creedal statement of the Christian Church.

Let’s go back to the beginning of this ancient hymn. This is where some of the most interesting and quintessentially Christian dogma is expressed.

~Christ Jesus originally had “the form of God,” coequal to the Father in power and authority from before time.

~Rather than just rule from on high, Jesus Christ emptied himself of godly power and authority to become a human being, accepting, as a consequence, a truly horrible death.

~He didn’t have to do this. As God he didn’t need to. He chose this horrible death in solidarity with suffering humanity, out of perfect obedience to God, humility and love.

~This, paradoxically, is the origin of Jesus’ power and authority, which extends to heaven and earth and under the earth: perfect obedience to God, humility and love.

What does it mean to bend the knee to this power—the greatest power the world has ever known?

It means to adopt Jesus as one’s own: to publicly say “You are mine and I am yours. We are blood.” It means to adopt Jesus posture of obedience to God, humility and love. It means to claim a part in Jesus’ tremendous yet humble power, which is far greater than the power of violence, coercion and arrogance. And which, in the end, will prevail over them.

Do we know what we are really saying when we profess and call ourselves “Christians,” thereby taking the Name of the one whose Name is above every name? Are we really able to say to Jesus Christ, “You are mine and I am yours. We are blood. And I am with you to the point of emptying myself for you and for those you love, as you did”?

Rest assured, Jesus has already declared these words of adoption over us: “You are mine and I am yours. We are blood.”