

**Altavista Presbyterian Church  
Rev. Eduardo Soto, Jr.**

**“Abba! Father!”  
Isaiah 61:10-62:3  
Galatians 4:1-7**

**First Sunday after Christmas  
December 31, 2017**

**Isaiah 61:10-62:3**

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

**Galatians 4:1-7**

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

**"Abba! Father!"**

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

In my youth I was pretty impetuous. I remember getting into arguments with my mother all the time because I just knew I was right and she was wrong. One day, at the ripe old age of 3, I resolved to rid myself of my parent's tyranny by running away from home. I was fed up, I had enough. So I grabbed one of my small blankets and began stuffing it with the essentials I knew I would surely need for the journey. Things like my little plastic toy hammer, in case I needed to repair anything. My stuffed dinosaur and accompanying VHS, because surely the road can be lonely and if I got bored we could watch a movie together, granted I could find a videotape player. And not least of all, a small pack of pudding, for eventually I'd get hungry—although I only packed one. With the blanket full of provisions, I tied it to a stick and my life as a traveling hobo would begin as soon as I stepped out the door. I announced to my mother that I was leaving and I left. I made it to the grand distance of about twenty-feet when I returned to the front door and knocked. My mother answered and I announced who I was and that I had returned. To my surprise, she told me that no boy by that name lived there anymore. So I told her that I was kidding and if she would welcome me back. She did so under condition that I understand that my

parents want the best for me and when they correct me it's for my own good. In acceptance, I took a shower, made some chocolate milk, and went to bed.

You see, I had to come to terms with the reality that I was under my parent's guardianship. While that included fun things like birthday presents, free food, and endless attention. It also included obeying their rules, accepting my punishment for breaking those rules, and living under their correction. I wish I could say I was the perfect child from that day forward, but my mother also taught me never to lie. What we in our youth see as the tyrannical domination of despotish parents is exactly as my mother said. Their nurture, guardianship, and correction are for our own personal development. I was under their law for my own good. Children are under the law of their parents for their own benefit. And while as children we may not see that benefit in the present, as adults, we surely do see how our rearing affects who we become.

This concept was no different some two-thousand years ago. While the details of parenting have changed over the centuries, the reality that children are under their parents has remained unchanged. This is what Paul is drawing on when he starts his fourth chapter of his Letter to the Galatians. He reminds the Galatians that the heir of a father's possessions, while technically owning the things of the father, does not come into that inheritance until a certain age. In the meantime, the heir is subject to outside guardians and managers of the estate. He is under a rule or a law that prevents him from receiving that inheritance prematurely. Paul is using this metaphor to describe the relationship between the human race and God. God, our Divine Parent, has an authority over humanity, and we humans are subject to God as his children.

The only difference between the metaphor and reality is that we, as God's children, are in constant disobedience to him. Everything we do in the flesh is done in opposition to God's commands. We hate his law because the Law shows us our iniquity. And so we constantly rebel against him. And through this rebellion man kept pushing himself further and further away from God. But if you remember what I talked about a few weeks ago, God made a covenant with humanity. While the human race constantly pushes away from God, God promised that he would never leave his children. For if God truly left us destitute of his presence, the wickedness that would tear us apart is truly unimaginable. And so what we've been leading up to this Advent and celebrate in this Christmas season is the coming of Christ Jesus. In the birth of Jesus we find the freedom from our slavery to the elementary principles of the world. By this phrase the Apostle means two things. He first means the reality of our sinfulness. We are slaves to sin and its corruption. He also means the experience of the condemnation of our sins. By this I am talking about the covenant of works, which I've mentioned before. Before Christ's advent, the Church was bound by the covenant of works to perform deeds of worship and service in order to gain grace and sanctification. And when a law was broken, certain specific steps of purification and reconciliation needed to occur.

Jesus entered into this world under that covenant. He came into the world under the Law and in the flesh. But he was born of a virgin and the Holy Spirit and not by natural means, thus his supernatural conception indicates his sinless birth into the world. In this manner is Christ able to

be the God-Man, his humanity and divinity are able to coexist in one body, yet distinct. As Jesus lived his life, we see in the Gospel that he did so in accordance to the will of God, which is in perfect obedience to God's Law. Jesus was the only person who perfectly followed the Ten Commandments and the Mosaic Law. His perfection and sinlessness in his humanity and his incarnate divinity meant that he and he alone could perform the ultimate sacrifice on our behalf. Which he did so on the cross. That action, that event won for us our redemption. In that moment there was a double imputation: our sin was accredited to Christ, so that he who knew no sin became sin. And his righteousness was credited to our account, so that we might be reckoned as righteous before God. And now when we stumble in our obedience to God, we are invited not to perform ritual sacrifices, but to repent of our sin and turn to God's forgiveness and strive not to stumble again.

It must be noted; the benefits of that double imputation are received only through adoption. In our natural state, we cannot benefit from the cross, meaning without first accepting Christ we cannot be reckoned as righteous. In our adoption as God's chosen children do we find our inheritance. Because of Jesus' life and work, we are able to be considered adopted sons and daughters of God. This means we are no longer slaves to the elementary principles of the world. Adoption means we are no longer bound to the wages of sin. That does not mean we become sinless. It means that sin's effects, which are death and eternal damnation, no longer apply to God's children. It also means that we are no longer under the yoke of the covenant of works, but rather under the new covenant of grace. This is good news! For no longer are we bound to the endless cycle of vain sacrifices and failing to fulfill the Law. Under this new covenant—under our adoption—we are granted access to God's redeeming love apart from any works of the law. We are no longer servants without rights. We are sons and daughters, co-heirs with Christ of his most wonderful kingdom.

One way we celebrate this glorious truth is through the Sacrament of Baptism. As Christians of the Reformed persuasion, we do not see Baptism as the moment of a person's adoption. Rather, God's providential knowledge means he has known his adopted children from before the foundation of the world. From eternity long ago God has called his adopted sons and daughters, and that adoption is made known in the present by the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit works immediately from the moment of conception. Since it is the Holy Ghost who takes the first action, Baptism is an outward representation of that inner reality. When we baptize infants, we are proclaiming to the world that God's adoption works from the beginning of time. And that baptismal action seals the reality of adoption onto the heart of the individual. As he or she grows in the faith, the Holy Spirit makes inwardly known the truth of that outward sign.

Today, we shall celebrate such an adoption. From before the beginning of time God has adopted young Nathan as his son and co-heir of the kingdom with Christ and with us. And in God's infinite and mysterious wisdom, he saw it fit that Nathan should join the ranks of this congregation through the rite of initiation in the Sacrament of Baptism. As we perform the ritual movements, I want to remind you that Nathan is not receiving his adoption in this moment. Rather, we are announcing to the world the truth that God's electing love has been at work in

Nathan since before he was ever born. God knew him before conception. God knew him in the womb. And God continues to know him today and will know him forevermore. As we make witness to that covenant, I invite you to remember your baptism and your adoption since the beginning of time. Open yourself to the Holy Spirit and be rekindled in your relationship with God. Please join me in prayer.

Abba, Father, you are our divine Parent, and have known each of us since the foundation of the world. Thank you. In this Christmas season we proclaim the coming of your Son, our Savior. We proclaim exceedingly with great joy because we know our adoption is finalized in the work of Jesus Christ. He who is the light to the Gentiles and hope to your people Israel is also the one who dwells in our hearts. Thank you. As we celebrate the baptism that he established, move us to live as your adopted children. Living lives of faith, hope, joy, and love. It is in Christ's name I pray this. Amen.