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Galatians 3:23-25, 4:4-7

John 1:1-18

This may be the first time I have preached on the First Sunday of Christmas. As a curate and assisting priest in Natchez, my boss usually gave me this Sunday off. The last few years as vicar and priest-in-charge, family gatherings have prompted me to take this particular Sunday off. This year, we did the family Christmas stuff early, so here I am. And I'm glad that I am. There are some tasty readings today. Let's begin with the epistle.

I have a soft spot in my heart for the letter to the Galatians. One of my major assignments in seminary was to research and write an "introduction" to an epistle. I chose Galatians. I already had a fondness for the book – probably based on the bit where Paul calls them "foolish Galatians." Reminds us that this is a real letter to real people whom Paul knew and loved. But it's the part where Paul talks about being adopted as children that has really held my heart the last seven years. When I actually adopted a child myself, the reality of Paul telling that we are adopted as children of God became manifest in my life in the most amazing way.

Intellectually, I knew about adoption. I had heard that the love and affection one has for an adopted child is just like that for a biological one. But then I was able to experience it. Being of a scientific bent, we had Zachary first as a control. I forget sometimes that we had to go all the way to China to bring Lucy home, instead of only to Hattiesburg as with Zachary. How a child enters a family has no bearing on that child's status in the family, at least in my experience. And since my experience has been one of profound joy and love, I am going to assume that it is the kind of experience our loving Father in heaven has in mind for us.

By virtue of our baptism, we are made children of God and thus heirs of his kingdom. The Holy Spirit resides in our hearts. That is why we are bold enough to call God "Our Father." We have been invited; we have been accepted; we have been adopted. We are brothers and sisters in the family of the Most High God.

And that is possible through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord and brother, Jesus Christ. Along with Galatians, this "prologue" to the Gospel of John gives us a message of hope and rejoicing. Note the harkening back to Genesis, "In the beginning." The writer calls Jesus the Word, the Logos. God spoke in creation and it was. In no uncertain terms, we are told that the Word was with God and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. God with us.

We call the Bible the Word of God, but that is decided NOT what John is talking about here. True, God does speak to us through Scripture, and in that sense it is God's word. But it was not dictated by God. It is not God speaking directly to the writers and their writing down what they hear.

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It seems sometimes that our more Protestant brother and sisters have elevated a book to the level of the divine. When your understanding is that only Scripture should be used to seek God, it is not hard to understand how the Bible can take on increased significance. If we base everything on this book, this book better be right.

We Episcopalians have been accused of down-grading Scripture, of not taking it seriously. The general response is something along the lines of “We take the Bible too seriously to take it literally.” The Anglican tradition sees a balance of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason as the guiding force of our church, facilitated by the Holy Spirit. We believe that God still speaks to the Church, and we hear God as a body of believers united in the Holy Spirit. Do we make mistakes? Of course. We are human beings, after all. But we also trust that God can and does make known God's will. That is why we have to listen to each other, hear what God is saying to each of us. “God said it; I believe it; that settles it” is not a very Episcopal thought. We see things as more complicated than that particular bumper sticker.

At the core of our theology is the understanding of the Word made flesh, God's in-breaking into the world. The light of God made manifest in the Lord Jesus Christ. A human being who was also God. God came into the world to show us the nature of God. We don't have to wonder what it would be like if God were one of us. We know. He identifies with the poor and the outcast. He offers healing and wholeness of mind, body, and spirit. He provides food for those who hunger, water for those who thirst. He has compassion and empathy for those around him. He cares. The light has come into the world, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Let us resolve that God's light may shine through us. As Christians, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are called to carry on the work of our Savior, to spread the light of Christ in a dark world. To be the light while showing people the true source of light. From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. What we have received, let us share with the world. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*