

The Gift of Family

Matthew 1-2; Ephesians 3

Appreciate the great response to Sharing Christmas with others. Many guests expected this evening—hope you'll be here.

There are many wonderful family traditions. In our family, usually the week after Thanksgiving, we put up the Christmas tree. Before we can put on the ornaments we have to put the ones from each year together so they will be put on the tree in close proximity to one another. These ornaments have special significance in our family, associated with people and events.

Churches often have traditions. Our dinner tonight is one of those. Our identity as a people is derived from our being the "family of God" (1 Peter) which was made possible by God's gift to us on a tree (Jesus on the cross).

One of the downsides to this time of year, for some, is that it can be a painful reminder of difficulties in families. Relationships that are estranged, the loss of a loved one who will not be there this year... For many, there is an idealized family scene associated with Christmas which is never met. Families are often "less than perfect."

Naïvely, some think "If we could just have families like those in the Bible, then our lives would be better. The Bible has divine guidance for families, but there are precious few families in the Bible that you'd want to emulate in toto. Your family, even the church family, will never be perfect, not because of God's inadequacies, but because of who we are. Still, we long for the day when the perfection of the family of God will be known.

Until then, we are still blessed by this wonderful thing called "family"; a gift from God.

I. Adoption

A. A matter of choice

1. Story of speaker who had adopted children and natural children. Had used his story as an illustration of God's choice. Adopted child chided other, "Mom and Dad had to keep you, but they wanted me!"

Eph 1:5, he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will

Prov 3:12, the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in

Hebrews 12:10, Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness

2. Not **blood** but **love** (shown in blood of Jesus Christ)

Deut 14:2, the LORD has chosen you to be his treasured possession

1 Peter 2:9, But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God (4:17, *Family of God*)

Gal 3:26, You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus

3. Invited to become family (Luke 18:16, **Let the little children come to me**)
4. John 7:37, “let him come to me”; Text has crowd questioning whether Jesus can be the Messiah since the Anointed One must come from Bethlehem and from the Family of David; not knowing Jesus met both requirement

II. **A New Family** (The story of Jesus’ family is one of chaos, uncertainty...)

- A. Joseph’s challenge: Mt 1:19, **righteous man**; What about whispers?;
 1. Some say it would be “Easy” if an angel tells you... (yah, right)
 2. People will still talk; called on to trust Mary & God...
 3. And it doesn’t get any easier: Bethlehem, Egypt...
- B. Mary’s challenge: Luke 1, **How will this be?**
 1. It is impossible; You have found favor with God
 2. Won’t quiet the whispers
 3. Some say it would be “Easy” if an angel tells you... (yah, right)
 4. Her story is one where she stored in heart, didn’t understand, pain of watching death

III. **God’s Family** (Ephesians 3; chaotic; challenging; disappointing; uplifting; safe)

- A. Heaven and Earth (Bigger than you realize; Heb 12, cloud of witness)
- B. Strength & Power (More than you realize)
- C. Christ dwell in your heart (His residence began in a stable...)
- D. Love (one another...)
- E. To him be glory

Ebenezer Scrooge, ***I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year.***

The very reason Christ came into the world was to give his life a ransom for many. He came to die so our sins might be forgiven and we become a part of his family.