

Order of Worship

First Sunday after Christmas, December 27, 2020

WELCOME

PRELUDE *In Dulci Jubilo* J.S. Bach

CALL TO WORSHIP Psalm 148 UMH 861

HYMN 228 *He Is Born* IL EST NÉ

SCRIPTURE Galatians 4:4-7

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

HYMN 217 *Away in a Manger* AWAY IN A MANGER

SCRIPTURE Luke 2:22-40

MESSAGE Rev. Kyochul Shin

GENEROSITY, INVITATIONS and CELEBRATIONS

HYMN 251 GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN

Go, Tell It on the Mountain

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE K. Schoonenbeek

Phantasy on ADESTS FIDELES

ADOPTED HOME Rev. Kyochul Shin, Markesan UMC

About eighteen years ago, my wife and I moved to Norwalk, Wisconsin from Evanston, Illinois because of the appointment that I had received from the bishop in the Wisconsin Conference. It was a big move for us because I was a city boy and my wife was also a city girl. We have never left home before we moved to America from the city of Seoul, Korea, a big forest of tall concrete buildings. But the town that became our new home in Wisconsin only had 587 people at the time, there were more cows than people, and we were surrounded by corn fields. Quite a change?

So when we drove to the town to meet with the congregation for the first time, my wife and I talked in the car for five hours from Chicago to Norwalk. "What if they don't accept us because we are from the city, because we are foreigners, because we are different?" "What if they don't

understand our English?” However, as we arrived there and began to talk with the congregation, all of those “what if” concerns just disappeared because we were looking towards the same place: Christ Jesus, to grow together to the Kingdom of God eternal even though we might not understand him or his love perfectly. It means, we all sensed that we are family in Christ and we embraced each other.

Then, for the next two months, our family became much busier than before because we had to prepare to have someone new in our family: our first child. I was extremely excited on that day, the fullness of time for this baby even though we did not know the exact time. But I always dreamed of holding a tiny little baby like the angel that I saw in the baby magazines on the cover pages. However, on that day and in that moment in the hospital delivery room, when I held the new born baby, the real one, in my hands, I was disappointed because it was not what I saw in the magazine: cute chubby cheeks with an angelic smile or peacefully sleeping.

No! The baby was skinny with lots of winkles. Hairs were not well arranged but dispersed and sticking to her head. Funny looking, potato like! However, it was true, the baby was tiny! Then, the baby cried, resisting me! I did not know what to do, so I handed my baby to the nurse right away. However, I welcomed her into her new home, of course. I mean, our home in Norwalk, WI.

It might be quite challenging for her to adjust to a new bright-wide-open-home from a dark-closed-small-womb because that previous home was a more comfortable place for her. I have learned a lot as this baby adopted a new home in this world, moving from a tiny womb of darkness. “Babies are beautiful because they bring us new beginnings!” She has grown up and now she is planning to move out of her home next fall for college. It makes me nervous already. But anyway, have you ever had a baby in your life? “No way, I am a virgin!” you might say. **However, is that true?**

A few days ago, we truly received a baby named Jesus, Immanuel, and put him in a manger and sang and celebrated what this baby has brought into our lives. Actually, this baby fully adopts us, embraces us in his heart. So I have a question for you. Where is this baby now? Is this baby still in a manger or is he coming out of the manger and growing in your life already? Then, are you ready to grow with this baby who embraced you? **But how?** Let us pray.... O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts... be acceptable in your sight. In Christ’s holy Name we pray. Amen.

So now, brothers and sisters in Christ, what did you hear from God today through our readings, one from Paul’s letter to the Galatians, and the other from a story of baby Jesus coming out of the manger, embracing and

growing? What did God speak to you today as you take the baby Jesus out of the manger, embrace him, and grow with him?

Actually, when Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians, the church was divided over the Law of Moses. Simply speaking, they had problems with the scripture. “I can’t accept that passage!” Or “If you don’t accept this passage, you are not a part of us or you deserve the punishment.” So this is a part of the guidance through the apostle Paul for the divided church: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children” (Galatians 4:1, NRSV). **Simply speaking, no matter who we are, God embraces us in His grace.**

We know Eugene Peterson, a well-known biblical scholar and a Christian writer, the author of the book *The Message*. He interprets “under the law” as “kidnapped by the law”. Wow! “Kidnapped by the law.” It means, we don’t have to keep that law because that is kind of a human bondage. It suppressed our freedom in God in our new life! **We have a right** to have a freedom as children of God and we have an adopted home now, a new home free from the bondage of that law **because of Jesus**.

However, in our gospel reading from the story of Jesus, it tells us differently - how Jesus was raised in his home. They followed the law very well **without thinking of it** as a bondage. “When the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord” (Luke 2:22, NRSV).

They walked miles and miles to keep the law. Google maps says it is 65 miles and it is a one day road trip by walking. But walking one whole day with a baby? They took that inconvenience to fulfill the requirement of the law for the baby. You will hear more about the requirements to fulfill the law for the baby in their tradition later from your pastor, I presume.

Anyway, according to the story today, it ended like this: “When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him” (Luke 2:39-40, NRSV). This holy family kept the law as a part of their life and the baby grew with the favor of God. However, those family members in Galatia who were adopted by the power of Christ Jesus two thousand years ago had a problem with it.

So where is it coming from? The law? And what is it for? We know as we visit the story of God’s Creation in Genesis, **the law of God was a sign of God’s love**. “Don’t do that! If you do, you will surely die. I don’t want you to die but live.” However, when Adam and Eve did not see it as a love of God, but a bondage of God, they broke the one and only law, “Don’t eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:17,

NRSV). They became free from God's love and grace but entered into the human bondage of sin and death.

So how did the Law of Moses come about later on? It was God's guidance that brought them back to Him as they observed it well, like what Mary and Joseph did to Jesus. More precisely, it was the obedience to God and His Word. In other words, it is all about trust in faith. However, we know those laws grew stronger and larger as people put more thought into it, embracing and adopting it in human ways, following their emotions and feeling first. Then it truly became their bondage. The Law became their bondage like the traditions we keep in our homes when the holiday comes: the family obligations, the traditions of my mother's side and father's side and now, with extended families, like my families' turkey recipes from my great grandmother that must be used, ways of setting up the table, etc. The more we extend our family, the busier our holy day is; and the busier our holy day is, the heavier our burden becomes.

So how can we raise our baby Jesus in our life out of the manger? **First, go back to the original story of the law. Then see the love of God in the law. But do not lose the privilege of God's children but take the responsibility of new people.**

It is the gospel that Jesus Christ brought us a little over two thousand years ago, νομὸς πίστεως, **a law requiring faith!** It is the gospel, a law requiring faith! So having faith in the law of God will set us free and it is the responsibility of the children of God, who got adopted by Christ as heirs of His Kingdom.

We all know the Christmas story. The story leads us into the scripture, the law of God, so that we can closely and carefully study it; however, that leads us to let it examine us deeply. So when we let the law of God examine us deeply, we learn humility, the humility of Jesus, in front of God. Then it leads us into the life of worship forever, whatever forms it takes, in the direction toward God through Christ Jesus! That is the law of God that makes us grow together as one family: adopted family! That is how the adopted family experiences the full freedom from the bondage of human reality of sin and death. That is how the adopted home looks like!

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are God's children who can cry: "Abba! Father!" joyously from our hearts because of that. Do we find a total freedom in Christ's story today as you cry: "Abba! Father!"? So now let us close our eyes for a moment, and spend some time with God, who called us as His children embracing us... as we cry, "Abba! Father!"

Now, as you take a new step into the year 2021 with a baby Jesus **in the law requiring faith**, may the freedom of God's kingdom lead your steps and prevail your ways all throughout the year, growing with the baby Jesus. Thanks be to God! Amen.