

**In the Fullness of Time
Galatians 4:4-7**

The story of Christmas is historical, theological, and personal.

A. Historical Reality (Lk 2:1-20)

We read the **historical** account from Luke 2:1-20, according to the careful researcher, historian Luke.

- Some want to deny that Jesus existed at all.
- But good historians don't agree.
- Even Agnostic New Testament Professor Bart Ehrman (no friend to Christianity) argues that Jesus did in fact exist historically.
- In his book *Did Jesus Exist?* he says, "**Jesus did exist whether we like it or not**" (340).
- At an event, someone in the crowd challenged Ehrman by stating that there is no evidence for Jesus ever existing. Here's his response (you can watch him say this on YouTube):

Look, I know, in the crowds *you* all run around with it's commonly thought that Jesus did not exist. Let me tell you, once you get outside your conclave, there's nobody who, I mean, this is not even an *issue* for scholars of antiquity. It is not an issue for scholars... There is no scholar in any college or university in the Western world, who teaches classics, ancient history, New Testament, early Christianity, any related field, who doubts that Jesus existed.... The reason for thinking Jesus existed is because he is abundantly attested in early sources. That's why.... *Early and independent* sources indicate that, certainly that Jesus existed. One author we know about *knew Jesus's brother*. And *knew* Jesus's closest disciple Peter. He's an eyewitness to both Jesus's closest disciple and his brother. So, I mean, I'm sorry, but, again, I respect your disbelief, but I, I, you know, if you want to go where the evidence goes, I think that atheists have done themselves a disservice by jumping on the bandwagon of mythicism. Because, frankly, it makes you look foolish to the outside world. If that's what you're gonna believe, you just look foolish. ("Did Jesus Exist Historically?")

Jesus of Nazareth existed, and He was crucified. On this, we agree with Ehrman. However, Ehrman doesn't believe he was the Son of God – on this we obviously disagree!

Luke 2 gives as the account of Jesus' coming in human history, and spotlights the uniqueness of this one born in Bethlehem.

Interestingly, Luke mentions this "**Manger**" three times.

Why? **So we could have a Nativity scene? Christmas cards?**

Is easy to lose sight of what's important verses what's sentimental and traditional...

NT Wright:

"What do people know about Jesus' birth? The manger – the Christmas crib. The most famous animal feeding-trough in all history. You see it on Christmas cards. Churches

make elaborate ‘cribs’, and sometimes encourage people to say their prayers in front of them. We know about the animals, too, not that Luke even mentions any; the ox and the ass feature prominently in Christmas cards and carols, though there is no indication here either that the shepherds brought their own animals with them, or that there were any in the place where Mary and Joseph were staying.... To concentrate on the manger and to forget why it was mentioned in the first place is like the dog looking at the finger rather than the object. Why has Luke mentioned it three times in this story? The answer is: because it was the feeding-trough, appropriately enough, which was the sign to the shepherds. It told them which baby they were looking for. And it showed them that the angel knew what he was talking about.”

The manger was **a signpost pointing to the location of the Messiah.** – Christ the Lord, the Son of David, the Son of God.

Born in human history. A revolution began! Let the world rejoice!

Augustus, the Roman Ruler hailed himself as the “son of God,” but the Son of God was born miles away in the most humble of settings.

B. Theological and Personal Significance (Gal 4:4-7)

But why did Christ come? What’s the theological and personal significance?

Galatians 4:4-7

“The Son of God became a man to enable men [and women] to become sons of God.”

-- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Personal Story

We went from zero to four kids in one trip to Ukraine! Then we added another a year later from Ethiopia.

The question we often get is, “**Why?**” I am sure many have wondered, “Do you have a complex?” “A short guy complex?” “A Bald guy complex?” “A Savior complex?”

The most commonly voiced question we receive is, “**Did you adopt because of infertility?**” But that was **not** our reason either.

We were motivated by theology, not biology.

As I began to study the Scriptures **for a youth camp Bible study** focused on the poor... **This passage is one of many that had a lasting impact on our life.**

God’s Adoption of Us

The greater work of grace is not a couple’s adoption of kids, but God’s adoption of us in Christ.

- **Christ left glory to come to earth to bring us into the family of God.**
- When we went to adopt our Ukrainian children, we were there for forty days.

- We learned a bit of the language, took on the customs, and lived as missionaries.
- **In an infinitely greater way, Christ took on flesh, a language, and dwelled among us, living as a missionary.**
- **His rescue mission involved “bringing many sons to glory.”**
- **That’s what Christmas is about.**
- **God becoming man that we may be sons and daughters of God.**

Huiiothesia

Paul used the word for “adoption” (*huiiothesia*, two words meaning placing a son) only **five times it is in the New Testament (see: 8:15, 23, 9:4; Eph 1:5; and here).**

- This does not mean the concept is not taught throughout Scripture, just that the term itself is only used on five occasions.
- These five occurrences appear in Paul’s letters to three churches living under **Roman law:** Galatia, Ephesus, and Rome (Burke, 61).
- Many of the Roman Emperors were adopted, most famously being Julius Caesar’s adoption of Octavious (**Caesar Augustus – Luke 2:1**. Burke, 62).
- **These sons took on the same rights and privileges as biological sons.**
- Paul will describe how we have been adopted into a much greater line of royalty, status and privilege.
- The only Sovereign King adopts us!
- This is privilege!
- **Remind yourself daily of it!**
 - **It should lift us from despair**
 - **It should lead us to worship**
 - **It should cause us to love one another more deeply**

Maybe Christmas season is a lonely time for you; a hard time; a grievous time.

Recall, dear Christian, the Father’s particular, passionate, and constant, and patient love for you, his child.

What Paul teaches us about the theological and personal significance of Christ’s coming?

#1: The Plan of God (4a)

Humanly speaking, adoption takes a lot of planning. My wife and I talked about it a lot. We looked at agencies. We asked questions. We thought out names. We considered the financial challenges. We attended seminars. **We sadly traded our Jeep for a mini-van! After selecting an agency, we had more planning to do. What is our discipline plan?** Where will the kids go to school? How will we teach them English if they are older children? How will we try to “attach” to our children? There were so many questions.

We had to get on the same page.

Consider God's **sovereign plan** here:

God's plan of salvation is a **Trinitarian work**.

- God sends "**the Son**" (4); the Son was "born of woman," born "under the law" (4b).
- Then we see that God "sent **the Spirit** of his Son" (6).
- **The Father administrated it; Christ accomplished it; and the Spirit applied it to our hearts.**
- God is a "**sending God**."
- God "sent forth the Son" and "God sent the Spirit."

In **Ephesians 1:4-5**: "In love, he predestined for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will" (1:4b-5, ESV).

- Adoption was planned before there was a creation.
- Adoption was not a back up plan for God.
- It was **not a "last resort"** for hopeless humanity.
- **It was plan A all along. It was never plan B.**

If you are a child of God, then you should marvel at the fact that God set us affection upon you, purposing to adopt you before the foundation of the world.

- God purposed to include you in his divine household.

Consider also the **perfect timing** of this plan:

This plan was executed in "**the fullness of time**." (4:4a).

- It happened in **God's perfect timing**. God is sovereign over human history.
- **He sent Jesus according to his divine timetable.**
- **The illustration of growing up into maturity (4:1-3) is compared to the fulfillment of God's plan for redemptive history.**
- **Jesus himself knew he came at the right time.**
 - "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mark 1:14-15).
 - It was the right time theologically.
 - The Law of Moses had done its work of preparing people for Christ (1-3).
 - Some also argue that it was the right time culturally, given many of the Roman policies and the Greek language.
- Sometimes I wonder, "**Wouldn't be better if Jesus were alive today instead of then? He could be on Twitter, and people could 'follow him.'** His sermons could be played on YouTube for everyone to hear."
- **Apparently not.** God knew what he was doing, and Jesus came at just the right time in history.
 - And if he came at the perfect time at his first coming, then we should remember that he will return at just the right time, also.

#2: The Uniqueness of Christ (4b)

Here we see the unique qualification of Christ to redeem and adopt us.

Human adoption: Screening process.

- This process is intended to keep the unqualified people away from adopting children (Uncle Rico and Cousin Eddie!).

Notice how the Savior is described.

- Paul says, “**God sent the Son**” yet the Son was “**born of woman.**”
- How does this work?
- **Did God send him or was he born of woman?**
 - Answer? Yes.
 - God sent the pre-existent Son. The Son was born of woman.
- This text alludes to the “**hypostatic union,**” or the union of Christ’s divine and human nature.
 - (**Bird story of student – relevant? Next day at a mosque**)
- Jesus is the God-man.
- **God sent Jesus**, implying that Jesus had no beginning.
 - He is eternal.
- Yet, **Jesus was born of woman**, a phrase that makes us think of the great gospel promise of Genesis 3:15, “I will put enmity between you and *the woman*, and between your offspring and *her offspring*; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (ESV, my emphasis).
- **Jesus came, as the seed of the woman, who crushed the evil one’s head at the cross.**

Perhaps you think, “This is a difficult mystery.” Indeed.

- But Imagine living in the first century.
- This mystery made the disciples and others scratching their heads.
- Simple questions would have boggled their mind like, “Hey Jesus, how old are you?”
- What would he say? **He could say something like mother’s side, he is twelve, but on his Father’s side he is eternal, or something like that...** hungry, thirsty, sleepy, homeless, grieving, agonizing
- There will be another Jesus.

Jesus is not one among many religious teachers.

- **He is in a class by himself.**
- **He is the one and only God-man. The only one qualified to bring us to the Father.**

In today’s culture, we are often asked, **“Why do you believe Jesus is only way to heaven.”**
There is no one else in the God-man category.

Only Christ could be the mediator between man and God (cf., 1 Tim 2:5).

- We do not believe in the exclusivity of Christ because we are trying to make enemies; we believe in it because of our view of Jesus.

Do not argue about it; submit to it.

- God sent the Son, providing a way for eternal life in this diverse, global family of redeemed and adopted sinners!

#3: The Purpose of Christ's Coming (4c-7)

A. Redemption (4c-5a)

The Price: *Born under the law*, to *redeem* those **under the law**

Humanly speaking, one of the greatest obstacles to adoption is the cost.

- Unfortunately, it costs a lot of money to adopt children, especially internationally.
- But I often tell people, “Cheer up, it’s much worse than the financial expense.”
- The bigger challenge is reorienting your whole life: teaching English, helping with homework, dealing with past issues.
- Adoption truly is costly.
- **“I cost a lot”**
- It is not an easy road, but neither was the road to Golgotha.

Paul reminds us that while adoption may cost us money, time, and a frustrating amount of red tape, it cost Jesus his life and his blood to adopt us.

This part of the text reminds us that **Jesus both lived for us and died for us.**

- **No blood, no adoption.**

Consider the phrase, “**under the law.**”

- Paul notes that it cost Jesus sacrificial obedience to God’s law.
- The law crushes us for we cannot keep it.
- It enslaves us.
- But Jesus kept it for us.
- He is our law-keeping King.

Then Paul says, he “**redeemed those under the law.**”

- Paul here highlights the sacrificial atonement of Jesus.
- Jesus “**redeemed us,**” or purchased us.
- **He died for those who could not keep the law.**
- How did this happen?
- Paul answers that in **Galatians 3:13**. He redeemed us “becoming the curse for us.”
- He took the judgment we deserved.
- He paid our debt.

Put the two together.

- **Actively, Jesus obeyed the law for those who could not keep it.**
- **Submissively, he died the death for others who deserved it.**

- Jesus lived the life we could not live (“under the law”), and then died the death we should have died (“redeeming those under the law”).

Matt Papa puts it well in his song “O Fount of Love.”

*O mount of grace, to thee we cling; from the law hath set us free.
Once and for all, on Calvary's hill; love and justice shall agree.
Praise the Lord! the price is paid; the curse defeated by the Lamb.
We who once, were slaves by birth; sons and daughters now we stand.*

- In his great love, he rescued us from our hopeless state.

B. Adoption (5b-7)

J.I. Packer: “[Adoption] is the highest privilege the gospel offers: higher even than justification”

Murray said, “adoption is ... the apex of redemptive grace and privilege” (in Burke, *Adoption into God's Family*, 26).

John Piper (who adopted an week year old girl from Georgia when he was 50!) simply refers to it in his wonderful exposition on this chapter, “**Adoption: the Heart of the Gospel.**”

i. Adoption involves rescuing children from terrible situations.

One does not need to think hard to make this connection to **human adoption**.

- Many children in orphanages have **suffered massive abuse**.
- Many need basic medical treatment.
- Countless millions suffer from **fear and anxiety**.
- Orphans often have no “**ordinary privileges**” like birthdays, daddy-daughter dates, or Christmas parties.
- **Many are depressed, hopeless, and some contemplate or commit suicide.**
- Tragically, a high percentage of un-adopted children, especially international orphans, end up in **prostitution or a life of crime once they transition out of orphanages**.
- I will never forget walking into a “**baby house,**” filled with Ukrainian infants, having no parents to hold them and feed them.
- It is all so dark and terrible.

Without minimizing the awful plight of orphans, spiritually, we were in worse shape.

- Not only were we “slaves,” but Paul says that we were “separated from Christ ... having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12, ESV).
- While orphans may never have the physical blessings of family, they can know the spiritual blessings of having God as Father through the gospel.
- Many today have a family on earth, but are still “dead in the trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1, ESV).
- That is a terrible situation, indeed, the worse situation to be in.

- But the good news of the gospel is that God adopts sinners like us.
- **And he did not adopt us because our attractive merits; He adopted us because of his amazing mercy.**
- We who were “sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:2, ESV), and “children of wrath” (Eph 2:3), have now become “sons of God” (Gal 4:6, ESV).
- Why? God is “rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4).
- In his great love, he rescued us from our hopeless state.

ii. Adoption involves a status change (6, “you are sons”)

I will never forget our court date in Ukraine.... Nervously, we presented our case to the judge, and he came back with the decision. He slammed the gavel and declared that we were the legal parents of the children. Life changed for everyone at that moment!

This legal change is very real in human adoptions.

- Our kids received new names, reflected on their birth certificates, and other legal papers evidencing their new identity.
- A legal transfer took place, which changed everything.

The good news of the gospel is that God the Judge slams the gavel, when we look to Christ as our Rescuer, and he declares that we are part of this family.

- We are legally God’s children.
- We have a new identity.
- We have a new name.
- We have a new home.
- We have a new future.
- Everything changes when a person becomes a member of God’s family through faith in Christ Jesus.

iii. Adoption Involves the Spirit of Sonship (6b)

God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

Paul tells us that one of the blessings of being a son or daughter of God is that the Spirit of God now resides with us.

- The Spirit of God is the proof that we belong to God.
- Paul says in Romans, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.... The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8:14, 16, ESV).

An additional privilege of the Spirit’s work in our lives is that **we now cry out “Abba! Father”** (Gal 4:6).

- This “crying” (*Krazo*) denotes a loud, earnest cry” (Matt. 9:27, Acts 14:14, 9:27) (Schreiner, 272).
- **Believers can cry out in their darkest hour, “Abba!”**

- **This is the term Jesus used for the Father in the Garden (Mark 14:36), as he cried out in his darkest hour.**
- **“Abba” signifies the intimacy we enjoy in having God as Father, the authenticity of that relationship, and the glory of such a privilege.**

But notice also that Paul says “**our** [plural] hearts” cry out to Abba.

- The Spirit not only changes our personal relationship with God individually; he also changes our horizontal relationships.
- Adoption not only means I am a child of God; it also means that **I have new brothers and sisters.**
- The church is a family of adopted brothers and sisters.
- The church is not a building you visit, or an event you attend, but a family of which you belong.
- This privilege also carries responsibilities, as Paul points out in Galatians (cf., 6:1-10).
- **Eyasu – Snowball: “Are all these people our family?”**

Transformation

We must also note that the Spirit comes into our hearts in order to change us into the image of Jesus, our elder brother.

- Paul tells the Galatians in the next passage, “my little children, for whom I am again the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!” (**4:19**).
- **Paul wants to see these adopted children of God change; he wants Christlikeness to be formed in them.**
- How does that happen? It happens as the Spirit of performs **Galatians 5:16-25**.
- **The Spirit of God works in adopted children’s hearts to produce the fruits of the Spirit, so that we take on more of the character of Jesus.**

In other words, adoption transforms children in every way.

- Sound familiar? I will spare you the countless stories we have of seeing our children transformed—language, eating habits, hobbies, interests, mannerisms, etc.
- Everything changes when an orphan gets adopted.
- It does not happen over night, but neither are we conformed to Jesus’ image overnight!
- Sanctification is a slow process.
- The Father may need to discipline us at time, but he is working in us by the Spirit, changing our habits and our desires.
- And we should be thankful that the Father is patient with us in this process!

iv. Adoption gives the child the right to be an heir (7)

Paul concludes this amazing passage by telling the Galatians that they are “heirs” through God.

Maybe you have been asking, “Why does Paul not **say “son and daughter?”**”

- Why “son?” “Is Paul a chauvinist?” Good question.
- No, Paul is not a chauvinist.

- He has already told us that there is no distinction when it comes to our status before God in Christ (3:28).
- The reason he says “son” is because only the sons received the inheritance.
- In Christ, every male, female, Greek, Jew, educated, uneducated, all who are in Christ, are heirs through God.

Marvel at the wonder of these privileges.

What unspeakable blessings we share now; but still, the best is yet to come!

- Remember, when Paul wrote about adoption in Romans 8, he writes in the context of *suffering*.
- **We are groaning in this life, eagerly waiting on the completion of our adoption (Rom 8:23).**
- **Our adoption is true; but it not complete.**
- Jesus did not “leave us as orphans” (**Jn 14:18**) but has given us Spirit.
- However, we are still longing for the culmination of it all.
- We are waiting on this inheritance.

What exactly is this inheritance like? Soon we will know! Jesus says the meek will inherit the earth! The Psalmist reminds us of the big idea:

Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth I desire besides you.
Psalm 73:25, ESV

What do you get if you are adopted? You get God! Forever!

- You get to be in the presence of God, beholding the glory of Jesus in total peace. Contemplate this every day, as you face the sufferings of this life (cf., Rom 8:18).
- The best is yet to come.

Applications

The applications are endless. I’ll just highlight 5, in five words:

1. **Salvation.** Receive adoption. If you’re not a Christian, here this good news tonight! You can be a new person, with a new identify, with guilt removed... And these privileges have an already-not yet hope to it!
2. **Adoration.** Rejoice in your adoption. It’s better than any present you will receive! Praise God with all your heart today!
3. **Supplication.** Refresh your prayer life. This doctrine should also lead us to pray a lot. We get to come with God has Father. What a privilege! We can cry out to him as Abba in our dark times!
4. **Identification.** Recognize one another as brother and sister. You are family. We hurt, we weep, we rejoice, we labor – together as family... Adoption should change how we interact with one another.

5. **Action.** Reflect God's love to this broken world. The proper response to grace is grace. We who know God's grace should be the one's extending it to those in need. In the gospel, we identify with the orphan, the widow, the stranger...
- **And we do it all "that they may see our good deeds and give glory to our Father in heaven"**

In summary, Christians, let us daily live out **our adopted identity, and enjoy "the highest privilege that the gospel offers."**

**"The Son of God became a man to enable men [and women] to become sons of God."
(C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)**

Merry Christmas.

