

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, Sunday after Christmas, December 30, 2018.**

When we were kids, one of the questions our friends would ask **us** in the days following Christmas is “What did you get?” And my guess is that our answer was not the answer suggested by our lessons I this morning.

The gospel answer is “grace and truth.” Not part of a child’s vocabulary. But give the child time, and it will be. Give you and me the time, and, if it is not already part of our vocabulary, it will be.

The first Sunday after Christmas is an interesting time. We move from expectation to reflection. What does it all mean? What’s the take-away? Here is John’s answer (**John 1:1-18**): “From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

Hold that thought.

Centuries before Jesus was born, the Prophet Isaiah (**Isaiah 61:10-62:3**) looked ahead and said, “The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give.” A “new name.” Hold that thought too.

St. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians (**Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7**), believes that our Christmas gift is “adoption.” Interesting and another thought to hold..

Now we have three thoughts to hold, three thoughts to reflect on. Grace, Name and Adoption. And let’s think about them as Christmas gifts. “What did you get for Christmas? Well, I received Grace. I didn’t deserve it, but God gave it to me. I received a Name, which I don’t fully understand. Have you ever heard of someone named Worthy, like I’m worth it? And I was adopted, which I don’t really understand because I already have a family.

Well, let’s put these three gifts in reverse order and see what happens. We are adopted. We are given a new name. And, with that adoption and new name, we are embraced by grace and truth.

Some of you have adopted. Others of you are adopted. Whichever end of the relationship you find yourself, you know how powerful and meaningful and sometimes confusing the adopted relationship can be.

There are issues to address in this relationship, especially as children grow up and begin to ask about their adoption. As a parent, and as a child, navigating these waters can be challenging. Adult and child need support, and that support can come from different directions. There's a name for such support: Grace.

Sometimes there is a need, or at least a temptation, to avoid parts of the adopted relationship. Most of the time, however, both parent and child want the whole truth and nothing but the truth. That moment comes when both parties believe that the child, perhaps now a young adult, can handle the truth. Truth is powerful. That is its nature. And, when sharing power, grace is really helpful, maybe even necessary. And maybe not just human grace, but Divine Grace.

So let's move from a hypothetical about adoption to the real birth of Jesus. Grace is still a factor.

Here is God, worried about His prize creation. God is particularly concerned that the human being has lost his or her way. Even to the point of forgetting where he or she came from and what is expected by the Creator. The human family needs help, needs intervention, needs some kind of reminder that God is alive and well and eager to guide the human being back into a proper path.

So, God makes a decision to Save. We call that decision Adoption. And one of the first steps in that Adoption is to give you and me a Name. And that Name is Worthy. That's right. In God's eyes, you and I are Worthy of being saved. That's not only what God wants for us; it is what God does for us in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

God adopts us, not in lieu of our earthly family, but in support of our earthly family. Unbelievable support, including an additional name – Worthy – and an inclination to know more about our origin and purpose. The fact that you and I search for the Truth with a capital T is because God plants this seed. It's the seed of Grace, that quiet but penetrating Love of God.

Our reaching, it turns out, is the result of God reaching. And when the meeting takes place, amazing things happen. St. Paul writes to the Galatians: “So you are no longer a slave, but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.”

Adoption can and does work here on earth. And adoption can and does work on a cosmic scale. The Prophet Isaiah understood this larger application. “He has clothed me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ....You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.”

This is what the parents of adopted children – both the birth parents and the adopting parents - believe and try very hard to get these children to believe: “You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.”

And isn't this what all parents want their children to believe? You are special. We love you. And God loves you. Never forget that.

As parents, we fall short some of the time, but our weakness is no contest when compared with God's strength. And, how did God drive home this point of everlasting love? In a series of events that covered many centuries. These events included a manger and a cross and an empty tomb.

Grace and Truth. Quite a Christmas present. Children probably won't understand right away this marvelous gift, but neither did we. But we learned. We studied. We prayed. We served. We battled. We trusted. And the more we engaged in these activities, the more we realized how important Christmas is, not only for ourselves and our families, but for the World. Not just “Peace on the Chesapeake,” but “Peace on Earth and Beyond.”

There is a symbol of adoption. It is a triangle – birth family, adopting family, and the child – intertwined with a heart. This symbol is not intended, as far as I know, to mirror the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, but don't the two traditions have a similar message? Namely that at some level, things begin to come together and make sense. Less confusion. More certainty.

There are times for all of us when things seem out of whack. But there are other times when things click. Christmas is one of those clicking times. It just feels right. Maybe we are worth it. Maybe we are Family. Maybe there is a God who cares so much about us that He will die for us and then rise for us and take us with Him.

What did you get for Christmas? We got Jesus. Didn't deserve Him, but we got Him. Or, better, He got us, and together we're in for a really interesting ride. And thus we pray in our Collect today, "Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Amen.