

# **SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON**

## **First Sunday after Christmas**

**December 27, 2020**

**Psalm 111:1–10 (ESV):**

### **Great Are the Lord's Works**

111 Praise the LORD!

I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,  
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

2 Great are the works of the LORD,  
studied by all who delight in them.

3 Full of splendor and majesty is his work,  
and his righteousness endures forever.

4 He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered;  
the LORD is gracious and merciful.

5 He provides food for those who fear him;  
he remembers his covenant forever.

6 He has shown his people the power of his works,  
in giving them the inheritance of the nations.

7 The works of his hands are faithful and just;  
all his precepts are trustworthy;

8 they are established forever and ever,  
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.

9 He sent redemption to his people;  
he has commanded his covenant forever.

Holy and awesome is his name!

10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;  
all those who practice it have a good understanding.

His praise endures forever!

**First Reading: Isaiah 61:10–62:3 (ESV):**

10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;  
my soul shall exult in my God,  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,  
as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.  
11 For as the earth brings forth its sprouts,  
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up,  
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise  
to sprout up before all the nations.

**Zion's Coming Salvation**

62 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,  
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet,  
until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,  
and her salvation as a burning torch.  
2 The nations shall see your righteousness,  
and all the kings your glory,  
and you shall be called by a new name  
that the mouth of the LORD will give.  
3 You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,  
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

**EPISTLE: Galatians 4:4–7 (ESV):**

4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

## THE GOSPEL - Lucas 2:22–40 (ESV):

### Jesus Presented at the Temple

**22** And 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 **23** (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) **24** and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” **25** Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. **26** And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. **27** And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, **28** he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

**29** “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,  
according to your word;

**30** for my eyes have seen your salvation

**31** that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

**32** a light for revelation to the Gentiles,

and for glory to your people Israel.”

**33** And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. **34** And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed **35** (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

**36** And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, **37** and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. **38** And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

## **The Return to Nazareth**

**39** And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. **40** And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

## **Sermon 50 – First Sunday of Christmas**

### **“Son of a God”**

#### **Galatians 4:4-7**

Dear friends,

In his letter to the Galatians Paul keeps it short and sweet, which is in the style of the letter for sure. Paul talks in this small section about family, and makes a contrast that shows us the incredible blessing of Jesus' work, talking about in terms that we would understand. There isn't questions to answer here, this passage is more about highlighting and celebrating that contrast, seeing what we can learn from it, than any mind-blowing insights.

Galatians is Paul's most focused letter. The Christians in Galatia were being seduced by false beliefs, something that is a danger to all of us for sure while we walk this earth. While the particulars of the beliefs are kinda weird and very specific to the time that they lived, the essence of what the Galatians were getting wrong is very common. They thought that they had to follow a certain set of rules in order to make God happy. Jesus spent His entire life and ministry doing and saying the opposite, and that is what Paul is trying to show them. Paul's goal is to get the Galatians to see that Jesus, His life, His death on the cross, His resurrection, is all they need. He wants to get them away from trusting what they can do for God and get them to focus on what God can do for them.

To that end, Paul takes on an analogy of sorts throughout the letter. He focuses on comparing two families, a slave woman who has children, and a free woman who has children. The basic argument that he makes is that, when a slave woman has children, those children inherit the slavery of their mother. That makes sense, but he uses the word

“law” to describe it, which makes it confusing to read sometimes. He says that a slave woman's children are born under that law, the law of slavery, which means they too will be slaves. A free woman's children are born freed from slavery, they have no obligation to live that life. So far so good. Paul compares us as sinners to children born of a slave woman. We didn't ask for sin, we didn't do something bad to earn our sin, we just have sin because of how we were born, just like, when a slave woman has children, those children are slaves. How we are born defines our destiny as sinners.

After all that, Paul goes on to talk about Jesus. **“ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”** So Paul talks about Jesus, he celebrates Jesus, as the turnover from one state to another. If you've been born a slave, there is almost no hope for you to un-slave yourself, to become a free citizen. We are born sinners. There is no way for us to un-sinner ourselves, to free ourselves from that sin and become righteous. Jesus makes that possible. He frees us from our enslavement to sin, He frees us from the destiny that has been pre-written for us, and gives us a new destiny. Jesus was born human as we were, but He was without the sin that goes along with our humanity. Jesus is human distilled, filtered, and perfected, and living a whole human lifespan that way makes it possible for us to be distilled, filtered, and perfected. For us to be rid of our sin. Instead of being slaves to sin, we're freed to be Jesus sons.

**“6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”** The word son is key, because only a son can inherit, and the inheritance is what Paul is trying to show the Galatians here. Jesus comes into our hearts because God sends Him, and it is Jesus who makes our hearts turn to God and see Him as our Father. That's what we inherit, Jesus, who changes us from slaves to sin into sons of God. We inherited Jesus at His death, which made it possible for us to be changed. Jesus

death is what forgives our sins and that is where the change comes about. Before, everything we did and everything we were was just different shades of evil. Now that our sins are forgiven, we have Jesus' good instead of our evil.

So that is the case that Paul is making to the Galatians. He's doing a line-by-line breakdown of what salvation is by using this analogy of inheritance and family. What should we take from this? We could take the same thing, I suppose, but we don't have the same problem. You and I are Christians just as they were, but I don't see you as being tempted to turn your Christianity into following rules. While we don't have to be convinced, I think, to see Jesus as the only solution to the problem of sin, like I said how Paul makes His argument teaches us a lot.

The contrast is that of family, and that's what stuck out most to me here. Family is literally the first gift of God, other than sheer existence. God creates the human species male and female but deliberately – at least I think it's deliberate – only physically creates a male. He makes man from the dust of the Earth, but not woman. He lets man sit in that isolation for a time. He brings the animals before man, and man sees that every animal has its counterpart. Male and female, male and female. No helper for him. Then God takes man's flesh, makes woman out of it, and brings woman to man and viola the first family is born. Adam takes Eve as a gift, He rejoices in being presented His other half.

If family is the first gift of God, it is also the first gift of God to be corrupted. The devil turns Adam and Eve against each other, and they remain against each other to this day. Family is a curse ever since the Garden of Eden as much as a gift. Earthly families are filled with sin, shame, disappointment, and hurt. There is nothing so poisonous and destructive as those closest to you, but at the same time, there is nothing that can help and no one that can understand and be there for you like family. What Paul shows us is that we are part of a greater family now, a new family, one not bound by sin, one not bound by geography or bloodlines. We're part of God's family, and God's family is pure and holy, and it has Jesus at the center.

Jesus forgives, and so we forgive our earthly families, even more so when we part of God's greater family. Family helps us understand all the truths of God's Word, as Paul frames it here. In family we find some of the greatest pain, and in family we find some of the greatest blessings. That pain reminds us that we are sinners, that they are sinners, that we inflict the most damage and the most disgrace on the ones that we love best. That's pretty awful to think about, but sin is pretty awful too. Family teaches us not to get cocky, too full of ourselves, reminds us that no matter what we accomplish, how much we get done, or what kind of wonderful people we are, there is always someone that needs to hear us say "I'm sorry." In the same way, the grace and the forgiveness that family shows us echoes God's own. The love that family shows us is so much like God's love that the word that He chooses to describe His relationship with us is "father." It shows us that we're not all doomed, that what God does is to change hearts, and changed hearts are capable of remarkable compassion and kindness. In that kindness we see God's own. We are not slaves of sin, we can be better. We can be better for the ones closest to us and the stranger alike. We can be better because God has made us better.

Amen.