

Doing Family God's Way

By Linda Rex

December 31, 2023, Holy Family | Christmas—During the Christmas season, which begins on Christmas Day and runs for twelve days, we ponder the extravagant gift of God's Son, Jesus Christ, and his incarnation as God in human flesh. Often, during Advent and Christmas, being with family is something that is very important to us. As we celebrate the first Sunday in the season of Christmas (this year it's on New Year's Eve), we honor Jesus and his human parents, Joseph and Mary, along with his heavenly Father.

On this Sunday, we read in Luke 2:22–40 about Jesus' mother and father taking him as an infant to the temple to carefully observe the requirements of the Mosaic law regarding the birth of a firstborn son, including ritual cleansing for the birth mother. Also, Mary probably offered her son to God, like many centuries before Samuel was offered up by his mother Hannah in gratitude for God's answer to her prayer (1 Sam. 1).

The apostle Paul, in Galatians 4:4–7, says that God sent his Son (Jesus is divine), who was born of a woman (Jesus is human) and born under the law (Jesus, as a human being, is born within the particular culture and religious structure of God's covenant people, the ancient Jews, who were bound by the law). The purpose of God sending his Son was to redeem those bound by the law, whether Jew or non-Jew, so that all might be adopted as God's children. To redeem something is to buy it back, which helps us to see that Jesus, in his finished work, moved humanity back to their original design as those who were created for and can participate in intimate, face-to-face relationship with God (Gen 1-2).

Then Paul says that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, making possible our personal participation in Jesus' own face-to-face relationship with his Father in the Spirit. Because of Jesus' redemption and the Spirit's indwelling presence, we can experience within our hearts that relational closeness with our heavenly "Abba" (today, instead of "Abba" we would probably say "Daddy" or "Dad" or use a similar term of affectionate respect) or Father. What the Triune God has done and is doing moves our relationship with God away from one based on performance and trying to be good enough to be loved to a place of grace and love centered in Christ and not in our own selves. The Spirit enables us to have and know God's indwelling presence, and to walk and talk with the Lord at any time. Jesus mediates our relationship with God, standing in our place, on our behalf, so that at any moment, we are at home in the Triune life and love.

As Paul points out, there is a profound difference between how a slave interacts with their master and how a beloved child interacts with their adored parent. There is meant to be a deep sense of trust, of affection, and of openness in a healthy family relationship. Too often, our human experience of parent-child relationships (and spousal relationships) isn't anything like this, so it is a challenge for us to see and know God in healthy ways. But this is why God gives us his Spirit, so that we can begin to experience Christ's own heart of affection and trust for his Father, and experience in a real way, that sense of affection and trust that the Father has for Christ within our own being. Through Jesus and by the Spirit, we commune with God and fellowship with one another, growing up in Christ as we respond to the Spirit's work in us and with us.

The interrelations of our Triune God teach us how to live in loving relationships with one another. Recognizing that each of us is unique, yet we are all equal and are meant to live in union with God and one another, provides a great foundation for how we interact with one another, especially within a family. So often, our differences create friction in our relationships, especially between parents and children (and between spouses). We want to keep in mind that Jesus is our unity—he is the center of our family, and it is his Spirit who binds us together in love. Truth

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tempered with love is essential to healthy relationships. And grace is so essential, too, and as it is offered and received, our bonds of love grow stronger and tighter. So, when things get difficult and problems occur—we turn to Jesus. We sit at his feet, and grow together. We pray with and for one another. We allow God's Spirit to flow into us and through us to one another, and rifts begin to heal, misunderstandings get resolved, and our relationships begin to look more like what they were intended to be—a living witness to the Holy Trinity.

This Christmas season is an opportunity to receive anew and participate more fully in Christ's own union and communion with his Father in the Spirit. This is a gift from God which we receive by faith, as we trust in all Jesus has done, is doing, and will do as we respond to his Spirit and seek to do his Father's will. Throughout this new year, may your families and friendships find healing and wholeness in Christ by the Spirit. Happy New Year!

Dear heavenly Abba, we are so grateful you sent your Son and your Spirit to redeem us and enable us to be adopted as your very own children. Immerse our families and marriages anew in your very own oneness, you who live as three unique equal Persons in one Being, so we will shine with your glory and goodness, through Jesus Christ your Son and by your Spirit. Amen.

“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.” Galatians 4:4–7 NASB