

Galatians 4:4-7 N.T. 178 (NRSV)

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

Galatians 4:4-7 N.T Page 178
“Child of the Light”

Opening Prayer: Please bow with me in prayer. Eternal Father, on this the first Sunday of the New Year, we gather as your children longing to spend time by our daddy’s side. Now, may your Holy Spirit bring to us your Holy Word today. In Jesus’ Name we pray, **Amen.**

Introduction: **There’s no stronger bond** than the bond between a parent and a child. It’s a bond that we can’t ever seem to express fully in words. Yet in the summer of 1997, there was a popular song that came pretty close capturing the sentiment of that bond between a parent and a child. **That song was “Butterfly Kisses”** written by Bob Carlisle. Ok admit it, how many of you get all teary eyed when you listen to “*Butterfly Kisses?*” (Raise Hand) Bob Carlisle wrote that ballad **about his daughter, Brooke**, as he thought back over their life together as Brooke was about to turn 16.¹ When Brooke was a little girl, Bob would kneel by her bed at night as she said her bedtime prayers. **Listen as I read a few lines** from Butterfly Kisses:

There’s two things I know for sure:
 She was sent here from heaven and she’s daddy’s little girl.
 As I drop to my knees by her bed at night
 She talks to Jesus and I close my eyes and
 I thank God for all the joy in my life
 Oh, but most of all
 For butterfly kisses after bedtime prayer;
 sticking little white flowers all up in her hair...

Yes, the bond between a parent and a child is a heavenly bond. Children are a gift from heaven. No relationship comes closer to depicting our relationship with God than that of the relationship between a parent and a child.

PAUSE

¹ <http://www.prolife.com/bob.carlisle.htm>

Move I.

Today we all can know God as our Father. To be a Christian is to call God Father. As Christians, we often pray together the prayer that Jesus first taught his disciples to pray. We pray the prayer known universally as “*The Lord’s Prayer.*” In that prayer, how does Jesus teach us to address God? The opening words are “*Our Father!*” God is Jesus’ Father, God is the Father of the first disciples, and God is your Father and my Father too. The relationship we all share with God is that of a Father with His children. The kind of sentiment that Bob Carlisle feels for his daughter is the kind of sentiment that God feels for each one of us too. **What a privilege we have** to be able to call the “LORD God Almighty,” the great “I Am,” the One who is the very creator of the heavens and the earth—“Our Father.”

Our Bible lesson today speaks of the central event in History that allows each of us to look heavenward and say with confidence “Our Father.” In Galatians 4, the Apostle Paul gives his most elegant expressions of incarnational faith. God isn’t just some divine entity way out there somewhere; God is the one who has come **to dwell among us** as a father lives with and cares for his children. That’s what incarnation means, God in the person of Jesus Christ became flesh and blood and lived among us. The coming of Jesus forever changed the relationship between God and humankind. At Christmas, not only was Jesus born as the son of God, all of us who place our faith on trust in Jesus were born as sons and daughters of God too. If it weren’t for Christmas, no one would be able to look to God and say, “Our Father.”

√

√

√

√

While the image of God as being Father was present in the Old Testament, rarely if ever did anyone address God as “Father.” Rather than thinking of God as “Our Father,” **the people of Israel** tended to think of God as the God of “**our fathers**,” plural. Their God was the God of their ancestors. While Israel’s God was certainly someone to be worshiped and feared; Israel’s God wasn’t someone you wanted to get too close to. **In fact**, in Old Testament times getting too close to God almost always meant instant death. Only a select few prophets and priests could come into God’s presence and live. **But God’s coming to earth** in the person of Jesus changed all of that. Now rather than being knowable solely as the God of our fathers, God has become knowable as the God who is “**Our Father.**”

There are many analogies used in the Bible to express our relationship with God. **There’s the analogy** of the Creator and his creation. **There’s the analogy** of the king and his subjects. **There’s the analogy** of the master and his slaves. And while all of these analogies are true, none of them expresses the intimacy of **the analogy** that Jesus gives us of the Father and his children. **In Galatians 4:4b-6 (NRSV)** Paul writes, “**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. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba, Father.’**” Abba is an Aramaic word that a Hebrew child would use to affectionately address his father. It would be a lot like when we say “**daddy**” in English. When Jesus speaks directly to God in Mark’s gospel (14:36), Jesus says “Abba”—Jesus says “daddy.” **Just as Brooke** was “daddy’s little girl” to Bob Carlisle, **Jesus was “daddy’s little boy**” to God the Father. That’s how intimate the relationship is that God the Father shares with God the Son. Because of Jesus’ birth, that’s an intimacy we all can share with God the Father too. **Yes, today we all can know God as our Father.**

End I.

Move II.

And we're God's adopted sons and daughters. Unlike Jesus, none of us was born of a virgin. None of us is the product of conception between God's Holy Spirit and a highly favored young woman. We're simple earthly people born of earthly parents. But our Bible lesson today reveals one of the great mysteries of faith. By placing our faith and trust in Jesus Christ, **we're adopted** into God's family. In God's sight we're treated the same as if we had been born as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. We share in the same rights and privileges with God the Father as Jesus Christ does as God the Son. **Jesus can call** God the Father "Abba," and we can call God the Father "Abba" too.

Here in Galatians 4, the Apostle Paul is using a metaphor from how society reared children in ancient Rome that is unknown to us today. Under Roman law, society **viewed young children as property** no different from slaves. It was common for a wealthy father to put his young child under the control of an adult slave who acted as the child's tutor. Although one day the child would be entitled to his father's estate, for now, that estate was held in trust, and the child was treated as a slave. But our Bible lesson today begins with the phrase, "**But when the fulness of time has come**" (Galatians 4:4a, NRSV). For a Roman child, typically their time would fully come **at about age 14** when the child moved from adolescence into adulthood. It was at this "fulness of time" that under Roman law the child gained full rights as an heir to his father's estate. No longer did society treat the child as a slave, but now society treated the child as an heir. That's why Paul concludes in Galatians 4:7b (NRSV) by saying "**So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.**" That which God the Father has given to His son, God the Father is also giving to all of us who by faith in Jesus Christ are adopted as God's sons and daughters.

V

On Christmas Eve, here in our church, 149 people gathered either in-person or on-line to celebrate Jesus' birth, which marked the coming of God's light into the world. It was the Apostle John who first used the analogy of light to describe our indescribable God. **In 1 John 1:5 (NRSV)** the Apostle writes "**God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.**" Remember John was one of the three disciples who actually witnessed **Jesus transfigured** into the light of God. John actually saw Jesus' "*face shine like the sun*" so it's fitting that John uses the analogy of light for God. But the Apostle John also writes about the **relationship between God and Christians** as being that of adopted children. **In 1 John 3:1 (NRSV)** the Beloved Apostle writes the words that we all recognize from the song: "**See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God.**" It was because of God's great love for us that God came to us as the baby Jesus. And it's because of God's great love that all of us who place our faith and trust in Jesus Christ are adopted as sons and daughters of God the Father too. Jesus Christ was God's one and only son. But in Jesus Christ, the time of God's salvation has fully come. **And now we are God's adopted sons and daughters too.**

End II.

Move III.

But we need to live into our true identity. We need to live each day as the sons and daughters of God who we are. We need to imitate our brother Jesus. We need to think as Jesus thinks. We need to act as Jesus acts. We need to forgive and Jesus forgives. And we need to love as Jesus loves.

We all know there are a lot of things we should do, but we also know we don't always do them. I wrote a saying about that back in the 90's and **published it on my first web page.** I've told it to you before, it goes like this:

You should do what you ought to do

But you will do what you want to do

Loving God makes you want to do what you ought to do.

We can only do the things we ought to do when we let God do things through us. So what is it we ought to do? **Henry Brinton**, the senior pastor of Fairfax Presbyterian Church in Virginia, came up with a list of Scriptures of what we as **Christians “ought” to do.** Here's **Rev. Brinton's top six:**

6. Ought No. 6 is from Romans 15:1 (NIV) **“We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak.”** We need to do a whole lot less judging of our brothers and sisters in Christ and a whole lot more bearing with one another. So, we ought to bear with or “put up with” one another.
5. Ought No. 5 is from James 4:15 (NIV). Rather than claiming that you know what the future holds, **“Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.’”** The future rests squarely in God's hands, not ours. So we ought to give ourselves up to God's will.

V

4. Ought No. 4 is from Romans 12:3b (NIV) “**Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.**” All Christians can do with a healthy dose of humility. Remember, if it were not for the grace of God, you would still be a slave. So we ought to be humble.
3. Ought No. 3 is from Colossians 4:6 (KJV) “**Let your speech *be* always full of grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how you ought to answer everyone.**” We need to prayerfully consult God before we speak to other’s problems. Rather than answer as we want, we need to answer as God wants. So we need to speak as we ought.
2. Ought No. 2 is from 1 John 3:16b (NIV) “**Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.**” Being part of the family of God means that you should make sacrifices for your brothers and sisters in Christ. Look at the people sitting around you, you should be willing to die for them if needs be. So we ought to make sacrifices for each other.
1. And finally, ought No. 1 comes from 1 John 4:11 (NIV) “**Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**” You can’t be a Christians without loving your brothers and sisters in the church. So we ought to love one another.

If we will only do as we ought as followers of Jesus Christ, then our lives will reflect the light shining upon us for our Father God. **We are** the sons and daughters of the LORD God Almighty. **But we do need to live into our true identity.**

End III.

Move IV.

And then we'll all walk as the children of light. Jesus was a child of the light. The Beloved Apostle John was a child of the light. If you've placed your faith and trust in Jesus Christ then you're a child of the light too. Calling God's people the children of light is not just some New Age fade. The Apostle John quotes Jesus himself as calling God's children the children of light. Just before Jesus was to be crucified, **Jesus referred to himself** as God's light as he spoke to his disciples in **John 12:35-36a (NRSV)**, **“Jesus said to them, ‘The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.’”** Because of Christmas, we have become sons and daughters of God. Because of Christmas, we have become children of light.

Many people in the church think that the only good songs were the ones written long ago. Everyone who ever wrote a good song is long since dead. But there's at least one song inspired by Jesus' words found in John's Gospel that was written within my lifetime. **The song is “*I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light*,”** whose words and tune were written by **Kathleen Thomerson** in 1966. Kathleen Thomerson is now retired but most recently she was the Organist and Music Director at Mt. Olive Lutheran Church in Austin, Texas. Thomerson studied music at the Universities of Colorado and Texas, the Flemish Royal Conservatory in Antwerp, and privately in Paris before writing many songs while living in Collinsville, Illinois, where her husband was a biology professor at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. But *“I want to walk as a child of the light”* is clearly Thomerson's best known song.

∨

∨

Listen closely as I sing the words of the first versus and chorus. But as I sing, **I'm gonna change** all of the single pronouns into plural pronouns:

We want to walk as children of light.

We want to foll-ow Je-sus.

God set the stars to give light to the world.

The star of our lives life is Je-sus.

In him there is no dark-ness at all.

The night and day are both a-like.

The Lamb is the light of the cit-y of God.

Shine in our hearts, Lord Je-sus.

I can think of no better song to hide in our hearts as we enter the New Year. **Thomerson's song** encourages us to live as the sons and daughters of God that we are. All we need to do is to accept Jesus Christ, God's light come into the world. **And then we'll all walk as the children of light.**

End IV.

Conclusion: Just as Brooke, was “*daddy’s little girl*” to Bob Carlisle in “*Butterfly Kisses*,” Jesus became “*daddy’s little boy*” to God the Father at Christmas. **Now, today we all can know God as our Father.** The God Israel called the God of “*our fathers*,” plural, is now known to us today simply as God “*our Father*.” **And we are God’s adopted sons and daughters.** While none of us was born of a virgin like Jesus, through adoption God has made us Jesus’ brothers and sisters. **But we do need to live into our true identity.** We need to imitate our brother Jesus and do as we ought. **And then we will all walk as children of light.** Do you want to walk as a **child of the light**? Then let the light of your life be Jesus.

Closing Prayer: Let’s pray. Everlasting Father, we thank you for sending your Son Jesus in our lives. May we always walk as your children of the light. **Amen!**

“*The Great Thanksgiving for the New Year*” See Insert and On Screen

10:30 Closing Hymn: “*I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light*” Red Hymnal No. 206
All Three Verses

Sending Forth: The light of God is in the world. By placing your faith and trust in God’s light you’ve become the sons and daughters of God. Go forth and let your light so shine before others that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16) **And all of God’s people said...Amen!**