

2 Christmas – Year A – January 5, 2011 - Homily
Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 84; Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-19a; Matthew 2:1-12
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Even though I wasn't adopted, it has always struck me how beautiful it is when adoptive parents tell their son or daughter that they are very special because they are chosen. The beginning of this passage from Ephesians speaks of all Christians being adopted as God's chosen children, through the grace of God and the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. In other Scriptures like Romans 8:15-17 we read more from Paul about adoption. Here's what he says, "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." As disciples of Jesus, God incarnate, we are special. We are chosen and destined by God for adoption, and therefore we are also heirs of God's grace.

In tonight's lesson from Ephesians, Paul speaks specifically of the three aspects of our inheritance. The first is the hope to which we are called. The second is the riches of our inheritance among the saints. And the third is the power of God granted to His beloved children. The hope to which we are called comes with the gift of faith and the Spirit of wisdom. It is the hope of the resurrection. Even though we are still celebrating Christ's birth, Jesus lives His entire life in the shadow of the cross. It guides His mission and ministry, and gives meaning to who we are as Christ's followers, and our mission to the world in His name. The cross is a symbol of shame to the world, and a symbol of victory in Christ to children of God's promise, like you and me.

The riches of our inheritance among the saints clearly denote our lives of faith lived in community. That means caring enough about God in Christ Jesus and about others to gather for worship together, and to love our neighbors. There is a synergistic relationship at work here. Together, we are so much more than the sum of our individual selves. Together we are even more than the sum of any given group of people. Why? Because together we become the Body of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit to continue Christ's mission of reconciliation and healing, in and to the world.

The third aspect of our inheritance is the power of God for believers. This is how we are empowered at our baptism by the indwelling Holy Spirit as living members of Christ's Body, the church. As noted in the quote from Romans, this power moves us from lives of fear, to lives of confidence and trust in the goodness and love of the Lord. It gives us strength to rejoice even when circumstances would dictate otherwise; strength to persevere through hardships; and to remember that God is in control and desires only the very best for us. We worship the Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit, and draw others to Christ through His light shining in our words and deeds. In response to the amazement of the earliest disciples when they saw and heard Jesus' great miracles He told them, "the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12). It was always necessary for Jesus to fulfill His mission in the world, returning to God the Father, and sending the Holy Spirit to empower you, me, and all believers to continue His mission and ministry. We are not alone, and miracles happen every day.

I want to share a story of such a miracle with you tonight. A boy, I'll call him Michael,

is the young nephew of a parishioner at another church Steve and I once attended. He desperately needed a heart transplant. Michael's name was on our parish prayer list for months as his physical condition deteriorated, and no suitable donor heart was forthcoming. It had literally come down to Michael's final few hours of life, and a group of us circled up after that Sunday service to pray once again for God's mercy. We found out several days later that a perfectly matched donor heart had become available just hours before Michael was to go on full life support. The transplant operation had gone smoothly, and Michael was recovering remarkably well. Sadly, the donor was a teenager who had died in hospital after a serious car wreck. His parents had made the choice to give the gift of life, and Michael's life was saved, even though they lost their own son. We continued to pray for the donor family, and for Michael. Not all miracles have such a high price, I'm glad to say, but there's an incredible amount of divinely gifted power in the prayers of God's children. Never doubt it for a minute, even when I best prayer is "Thy will be done".

Paul invites us to enter into the wonder and awe of our God, who loves us so much that He became one of us, lived and died for us, and is now seated at the right hand of God the Father. Our God is big enough to choose us, use us, and to care for us, despite, or perhaps because of our human foibles. This is why we are called to gather in God's Name and worship. It is why we love our neighbors as ourselves. Just as the letter to the Ephesians has an overarching theme of unity in Christ, we too have a greater purpose and mission. God's purpose and mission for our lives supersedes, and truly puts into perspective, such trivial matters as petty differences, arguments, and disagreements. We are always moving towards greater unity in Christ Jesus, towards reconciliation amongst ourselves, and the reconciliation of the whole world to God in Christ's name. Our trust in the Lord is a major factor in our spiritual growth, and a measure of just how well God can use us to love and serve Him and our neighbors in all places and at all times, according to God's will. That sounds like more than any one of us can handle alone doesn't it? That's why we are not alone. God is with us, and we have the community of faith to lean on as well. God is our guide to all Truth and wisdom. Nothing can change or frustrate God's eternal plan.

As beloved and adopted children of God, we are heirs of God's kingdom. And so we have to ask ourselves, how might God use us this week? How might we share God's spirit of wisdom and revelation with someone else this week? How might we know God in a new or deeper way? How will we offer our thanks and praise to the Lord God? God's good pleasure is to bless us with an abundance in the riches of His grace. How will we respond to His glorious gifts, and the "immeasurable greatness of his power for us" in His service? May the miracle of this season of revelation in the mystery of the incarnation enlighten all our hearts.

Amen.