

John 1, Galatians 4 "Holy Night"

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Preacher: Will Spink

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Love getting to sing those great Christmas carols. Thank you all for leading us in that. We've been talking about those at Southwood this Christmas season.

Some of our favorite Christmas carols and how they point us to great biblical truths about our Savior who was born at Christmas. Tonight was an easy decision in that regard.

Had to go with Silent Night, right? We're going to sing it together in a few minutes at the end of the service. But you may actually be thinking, well, I don't know, Silent Night, Holy Night, all is calm, all is bright.

It doesn't sound like a lot of Christmas Eves I've known. If you were here in the first service that had a greater proportion of young children, you would have said there was nothing silent about any part of that service, including this one.

[1 : 11] It doesn't seem very descriptive, perhaps, of many Christmas Eves that you have known. Silent and holy and calm and bright.

In some ways, it's not descriptive of the first Christmas Eve either, is it? We know as Mary labors over the birth of Jesus, it was not a silent night.

Anybody who thinks it was a silent night has never been in a delivery room or tried to sleep the nights that follow a baby's birth. It's just not what it's like. But it was certainly a holy night.

How can we be so sure of that? Well, in the Bible, something being holy is not determined by a complex formula. It's not good deeds weighted over against mistakes factor in level of Bible knowledge and relative holiness comes in.

That's not how it works. Now, what makes something holy is God showing up. His presence.

[2 : 24] The temple in Jerusalem, for example, wasn't holy because of all the gold and jewels and so forth, the expensive things used to make it, it became holy when God showed up to dwell there.

So what would make this night holy for you is not just going into a church building, not just dressing up in your Christmas best, not even just being together with family as special as that can be.

It doesn't make it holy. It would be God showing up with you that would make this night holy.

God's Word tells us unequivocally that's what happened that first Christmas night. John chapter 1, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.

And we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. The Son of God loves pure light, has come to earth, in a manger, in Bethlehem, and so it's holy.

[3 : 50] God is there. That's my desire for each of us tonight. Whether your night is silent or not, I can't control that.

But my heart would be, my desire would be, that for each of you, this night would be holy. And some of you may say, No thanks, Pastor.

I don't care at all for my night to be holy. I'm only in this room because my family dragged me here. I've had, in fact, quite enough religion.

Thank you. I don't need another ritual. I don't need another person telling me how I must live my life. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about tonight being holy because God, the one you've wondered about, or kept at arm's length, or perhaps been running from lately, even though you know that you need Him, He shows up.

Because when Jesus shows up in our lives, it changes everything. It's very different from getting religion. When He shows up, that person, that relationship, is the gift that keeps on giving.

[5 : 11] That's really the one thing I want us to see tonight about God entering into our lives. We'll see it in Galatians chapter 4.

Galatians 4, starting at verse 4. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son.

This is Christmas, right? God saying, now is the right time. The song we're going to sing at the end, Silent Night, calls it the dawn of redeeming grace.

God decides this is the perfect moment for Him to send His Son to enter into our world. And grace dawns in our lives.

What's the result of it for us when that happens? Keep reading here. God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

[6 : 20] Jesus comes to bring us into a relationship, to make us sons and daughters of God, to redeem us and adopt us.

Adoption then is the gift that keeps on giving. I read just this week the story of an adoption in a town right outside of Birmingham.

It's the story of 11-year-old Maya. Maya was asked this year, like many of you kids might have been, to make a list for Santa. What did she want for Christmas?

Did any of you do that this week? Some of you made a list and gave it to somebody? Some of you did. Raise your hand. Okay, yeah, okay. Some of you adults did. And you know what was on Maya's list?

Three things. A sweatsuit, a water bottle, and a forever family. That's what she wanted. Those three things.

[7 : 20] You know why? Because Maya, in her 11 years, had spent them bouncing around from foster family, to foster home, to group home, one place after another, always moving, never staying anywhere, very long.

But last week, her foster family was able to adopt her. Got a picture of that family here. Can we put that picture up on the screen for us?

There it is. She is here on the far left. That's Maya. You can't probably read that, but she's holding a sign that says, Merry Christmas to me. I'm now an adoptee.

That's her Christmas present. Her new mom said, now she gets to have that feeling of forever and stability. She is home forever.

Isn't that so much better than a sweatsuit or a water bottle? Isn't that a better gift? See, because getting a family at Christmas is a gift that keeps on giving because she'll get other gifts like a sweatsuit and a water bottle some other time, right?

- [8 : 30] And probably a lot of other gifts. When else do you think she might get gifts? Not just at Christmas, but probably on her birthday and maybe on Valentine's Day or Easter or who knows, maybe just some days just because her parents love her.
- They'll give her other gifts. That's what it means that she's now their child. Getting a person, a relationship, being adopted for Christmas is the gift that keeps on giving.
- That's the glory of Christmas. God doesn't send His Son into the world with a few one-time gifts. You know, forgiveness for a single sin if you can think of a big one.
- Maybe a second chance at life so be good for goodness sake. A meal to fill your stomach for one day. No. Jesus comes to invite us into a family.
- To seat us at the King's table forever. To invite us into an eternal relationship as sons and daughters of a heavenly Father. Watch how this happens in Galatians 4 as we keep reading.
- [9 : 48] Because you are sons, what happens? God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, Abba, Father. So you're no longer a slave but a son.
- And if a son, then an heir through God. We become God's sons and the gifts just keep on coming, don't they? Because He loves us so much.
- God gives us the first Christmas gift. He wraps Himself in flesh. Enters into our world as a baby in a manger. God gives Himself to us as the gift that keeps on giving because when we receive the gift of Jesus, when redeeming grace dawns in your heart for the first time, for the hundredth time, then in that moment getting through life, doing enough things to be significant, getting back to God and knowing Him is no longer on us anymore.
- If Jesus has come for you, He's taken care of all of that. That's what grace means. It's not about you cleaning yourself up and figuring life out and working yourself to the bone only to come up tired and disappointed again.
- It's about you being loved and adopted even though you could never be good enough to earn your way into His holy family. That's grace.
- [11 : 28] It's not up to you to find a way back to God. No. Christmas is that God has come and found a way to you.
- He wanted you to be in His family so He sent His own Son and took care of all the legalities, all the issues, all the paperwork, went all the way to the cross and gave His life in order to make that happen to have you in His family.
- I couldn't possibly list all the other gifts that come with that but when God gives Himself to us, brings us into His family, we see He gives us His Spirit in our hearts so that we recognize Him as our Father and are helped to trust and follow Him.
- He gives us access to the God of the universe whenever we want to talk with Him. We can just cry out and He hears us. He gives us our daily bread every single day and provides for whatever other needs we may encounter.
- He gives us loving discipline that molds our hearts and at the same time never rejects us because we are His. He gives us forgiveness of all of our sins because Jesus has paid for all of them, the big ones and the small ones, the past ones and the future ones.
- [12 : 54] He's paid for all of them and He gives us an eternal inheritance that can never perish or spoil or fade, kept in heaven for us who have been made heirs of the King of heaven who owns it all.
- and now we're not just sons, we're heirs. All of those gifts and many more, every spiritual blessing, all of the things you have to be grateful for came wrapped in that one gift of Himself that God gave us that first Christmas.

He came to redeem us and give us adoption as sons so that we have a new home forever. forever. Listen, I want this to be a holy night for all of us, for each and every one of you.

And for some of you, you haven't experienced what I'm talking about. You've never known a relationship with God like that as His child. Listen, we're really glad you're here.

I've got good news for you too. You don't have to figure that out. It's not up to you to fix yourself and make yourself good enough for Him and work your way into His family.

[14 : 18] No, He is still adopting children into His family and that is good news. He is loving people, welcoming them in because He's like that.

And this night can be holy for you because God can welcome you into His family for the first time. The sign of Christmas for you this year can be Merry Christmas to me.

I'm now an adoptee not just of an earthly family but adopted by a Heavenly Father who will never ever stop loving you.

Many of us in here already know our Heavenly Father but this night needs to be holy for us too. Many of us have known our Heavenly Father for many years by faith in Jesus.

We've trusted Him and been adopted into His family but if we're honest it doesn't necessarily feel holy lately. Maybe because of sin in your heart longing for other things more than for your Father's home.

[15 : 36] Maybe it's grief struggles of this life have you stressed or exhausted ready to give up. We need tonight to be holy too don't we?

We need God to show up and make this a holy night and the good news for us is that it is because He has He is here by His Spirit He has come to meet with us He has set this table and He's invited you as it were to pull up a chair and have a seat at this table where you eat with your family at your Father's table forever.

You can finally be home. you can finally eat and know the love of your Father who if He gave His Son for you how will He not also along with Him graciously give you everything you need?

He'll keep caring for you. That gift will keep on giving every moment of every day through your life and forever you will finally have a forever home He says you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

That's what having a father means. Jesus came and gave Himself so you could be in that family. Remember what He said when He came for you.

[17 : 08] That first night that He was betrayed He looked at His disciples and said this is my body. He took that bread and said it's not going to be yours.

He broke the bread this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And after supper He took the cup and He said because of all the things you've done you know your blood should have to be shed and sacrifice after sacrifice you've seen it happen.

He said this cup is a new covenant it's in my blood shed for many for the forgiveness of sins not your blood shed anymore for your sins but His death until He comes.

You proclaim that what you need is His death in your place so that you can be brought into your Father's family. This is the table of God the Father set for us by the Son the Lord Jesus Christ in His body and blood so if you know Him if you are a part of that family by faith in Him whether you are a part of that family in this particular church or any other church that preaches the good news that you can be in God's family by grace by faith in Jesus then come and celebrate with us tonight that your Father loves you if you don't know Jesus if that's not your story then we don't want to ask you to come and do outwardly something that's not true of you inwardly but we are so glad that you're here with us tonight and we would love for you to be able to come and be a part of this with us when people come forward each family or group of friends will gather as a small group around this table and we're going to pray for every one of you and so if you'd like just to come and have a chance for us to pray with you we would love to be able to do that tonight so when the ushers invite you to come forward and back please feel free to do that and we will pray with you as you come if you're not able if it's difficult for you to come to these tables tonight just let the usher know when he gets to your row we would be delighted to bring the supper to you right where you are let me pray and then we'll celebrate together

Jesus thank you that tonight is holy because you are here because you have come and given yourself for us and sent us your spirit that we would remember your love so would you use these very common elements of bread and juice for that holy purpose in our hearts that we would meet with you and know and taste your love we ask it in your name amen let's celebrate his love together for more information visit us online at southwood.org