

Adoption

Adoption is a powerful idea. It is the idea that someone would receive into his life another person who has no natural claim of blood or kinship. It is the idea that this reception would take place in such a way that the one being received would be fully, completely embraced and forever treated as though he were of one blood with the adopting person. Adoption is the idea that the outsider, the stranger, the “other” will be received and treated in every way as though he were an insider, who belongs, and is not “other” but “the same.”

We see adoption in Matthew’s story of Jesus’ birth (Matt. 1:18-25). The child of Mary is not the child of Joseph. He is an “other,” a stranger, an outsider intruding into Joseph’s life. Joseph’s first and natural inclination is to send this baby packing. Of course, Matthew says that Joseph was going to put Mary away, but putting her away meant putting the baby away too. Then the angel intervenes at just the right moment and Joseph adopts Jesus as his own son.

And so it is that Jesus, the adoption of humanity into the life of the Trinity, is himself an adopted child. The agent of the Father’s plan of adoption experiences adoption.

I have an image of Joseph as he is dying. Jesus is by his bedside. The gospels suggest this moment took place in Jesus’ life sometime between the age of 12 and the age of 30. As Joseph breathes his last, I imagine him looking at the young man his adopted son has become and thinking to himself “That’s the best decision I ever made.” And in the next instant, as Joseph’s eyes are opened in the resurrection he once again sees his adopted son—now glorified and seated at the Father’s right hand—and for the first time he knows that Jesus, the one whom he adopted, has become his adoption into the Father’s eternal life.

~ Jonathan Stepp