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Volume 4, Issue 1

The Adopted Life

Trinity and Humanity, Together

Born the King of Angels

Traditionally, there are two events in Jesus' life that we celebrate on Epiphany (which is coming up in two days, on January 6, and will probably be celebrated in most of our churches this coming Sunday, the 10th.) One is the visit of the wise men, or magi, or "kings" - as they're sometimes called. The other is Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan by John the Baptizer.

What both events have in common is that they shine light on who Jesus is, and an "epiphany" is a moment when the light shines and the truth is revealed. The visit of the magi reveals that he is the King and Savior of the whole world, both Jews and Gentiles. Their visit shows that even in his infancy, as the King of all creation, other kings (from the East no less!) bowed down and worshiped him. Jesus' baptism reveals that he is the Son of the Father, anointed in the Holy Spirit and baptized (i.e. immersed) in our human nature (Mark 1:1-11).



In regards to Jesus' baptism there are two sentences of Scripture that might be worth thinking about this Epiphany. The first is from the Psalms:

What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels and crowned him with glory and honor. ~ Psalm 8:4-5

The other is from the Letter to the Hebrews (author unknown):

For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father"? ~ Hebrews 1:5

At the moment of Jesus' baptism the Father spoke from heaven and said "This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." The Father's Son in his humanity, as the man Jesus Christ, looks like he is lower than the angels - and in some sense, like all of us human beings, he is. Yet, because of Jesus' humanity, all humanity has been crowned with glory and honor. He shares his destiny with us, and it is a destiny that no angel can ever, or will ever share. Jesus shares with humanity his destiny to live forever as the Father's Son - not as ministering spirits (like angels) but as really adopted children. So, when the Son comes in the flesh and the Father says to him "You are my Son," it is an epiphany for us and for the angels. It is the revelation that humanity is included in Jesus' sonship. As he has been baptized in the Father's love and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, so he now baptizes us in that love and anointing. Because of Jesus we are the beloved children of the Father on whom his Spirit has descended and on whom his favor rests (Luke 2:14.) And that's something the Father never said to any angel.

As the great hymn of Christmas says, Jesus has been "born the King of angels." And we are all included in him. Merry Epiphany!

~ Jonathan Stepp

The Meaning of Christmas

Christmas isn't quite over yet - we have two more days before Epiphany. What's more, we really don't understand the full meaning of Christmas until we see all of Jesus' life unfold in his baptism, death, resurrection, and ascension. In that spirit, then, we have to say that the meaning of Christmas is:



Trinity! In the middle of everything, there is the Relational Being of Father, Son and Spirit! A relationship of pure Love that only knows how to Love and give itself away. That is where everyone and everything has gotten its start, and where everything has its ending in Jesus, the Omega!

Adoption! The reason for thinking of creation and actually creating everyone and everything is that humanity and creation might share in the exact Love and Relational Being of the Father, Son and Spirit! We were to be Adopted and Included in the Father, Son and Spirit's knowing of Himself as He really is, and His knowing of everyone else!

Incarnation! Jesus, or Christmas Himself, was the Person designated in God to pull off the Adoption of Humanity and Creation. Being God as Man, and the Mediator between God and Creation, He was the only one who could possibly pull off the tremendous feat of Adoption! He pulled off this feat in the totality of his life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension, and this is why the world literally screams and sings his name at this time of the year, and at Easter like at no other times!

Secret! Because Jesus pulled off this feat of our Inclusion and Adoption into the very life of the Father, Son and Spirit roughly 2000 years ago, that is the secret within and behind all of humanity and creation! That is why no one on their deathbed ever wishes they had spent more time at work, but usually wish that they would have given more time to the important relationships in their life.

Education! Educate, literally means "to draw out." Because of Who Jesus is, and what he has done, he literally loves in everyone. He is NOT everyone, and everyone is NOT him, but He is the one in whom all things are created and live, and all things have their being in Him. Therefore, Jesus is the "thing," or rather the One that is working His relationship with his Father in the Spirit out of us from the depths of our being in the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us all!

Hold all of this grace together and you will see that the simple meaning of Christmas (of Jesus, Himself, being given permanently to humanity and creation!), is the Mystical and real Union of the triune God, Humanity and creation in Relationship forever!

Thank you for helping me to see, understand and know more this experience, Dr. Baxter Kruger (one of my great friends and mentors!)

Merry Christmas to Each of You!

~ Timothy J. Brassell



With Great Freedom Comes Great Responsibility

A Trinitarian, Christ-centered reading of Galatians 5.13 – 6.18

(5.13) You have been set free from your old self-centered darkness and isolation. USE YOUR FREEDOM. Not to enslave yourself again to your own desires, but through love to become joyful servants of one another! (14) For Papa gave us Torah to teach us this one thing: “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.” (15) For some time now, you’ve been practicing the “Eat thy neighbor” ethic. How’s that working out for you?

(16) The Holy Spirit lives in your spirit; He knows reality and how to live in it. Do what he says! Yes, I know your body doesn’t always agree with what your spirit knows. Your body is still learning. It still hears the echoes of your old way of thinking, and sometimes it wants to return to those old behaviors that were destroying you and the people you care about. Don’t give in to your old patterns! The Holy Spirit in you is strong enough to conquer your body. Don’t give up! (17) Your body (your outer self) fears the things you need most, the things the Spirit is drawing you toward. And the Spirit detests the unhealthy and dysfunctional things your body craves. What’s going on inside you is war, and I know how much it hurts.

(18) But if you follow the Holy Spirit, there is no more need for Torah to restrain you. (19) Because when you see and think with the clarity of the Spirit, it becomes obvious to you that what your body craves is deadly poison:

Having sex without real intimacy, vulnerability and commitment;

Disregarding the boundaries that keep you (and others) safe;

(20) Arranging your life around things that aren’t worth arranging your life around.

Trying to control things that aren’t yours to control;

Letting hard feelings fester under the surface of your relationships, instead of dealing with conflicts head-on;

Attacking and excluding people who have hurt you;

(21) Valuing things more than people;

Using pharmaceuticals and parties to avoid dealing with reality;

Etc...etc...etc...

Like I’ve told you many times, these things are poison because they are all ways to avoid receiving what we have been promised! The kingdom of God has been given to us, and these poisonous behaviors are all ways of running away from the gift! To avoid dealing with reality is to imprison yourself inside your own toxic myths. (22) Reality is worth dealing with, because reality is where the Spirit is at

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Great Freedom . . . (cont.)

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work. Here in the real world, he is taking the beautiful life of Jesus and putting it inside us:



Desiring good for all people

Enjoying everyday life

Living relaxed, ready to receive whatever the future brings

Feeling happy while we wait for things

Treating all God's creatures like beloved family members

Giving and receiving with open hands, because our stuff doesn't own us

Doing what we say we'll do

(23) Taking care not to hurt those we are capable of hurting

Behaving according to well-thought-out choices, rather than according to the moment-by-moment fluctuations of brain chemistry

There's no law against any of THAT, is there? (24) To receive this new life from Jesus is to let go of our old life and its toxic cravings and behaviors. We know what results when we follow nothing but our own urges. (25) So now instead, let's try living by the Holy Spirit's impulses, and then watch what happens as a result! (26) If we do, we will start seeing each other, not as rivals, but as friends.

(6.1) And since you ARE friends, I want you to hold each other accountable. To live in the Spirit is to live in truth, and none of us can do it by ourselves. When you see your friend crossing the boundaries of healthy living, go talk to him about it. Not to manipulate or shame him, but to gently tell him the truth about his behavior and its effects. If you keep silent or enable him in some other way, you are just helping him destroy himself, and you're damaging yourself too. (2) As friends, we share our strengths AND our weaknesses. *We get to carry each other.* That's what "Love thy neighbor" is all about. (3) And remember you're no better than anybody else; everybody's got strengths and everybody's got weaknesses. Period.



(4) Remember, you're responsible for YOUR actions, not your neighbor's. Pay attention to your own behaviors, the ones you like AND the ones you don't, and then decide how you want to act in the future. (5) Take responsibility for your own life. Don't be a leech. Do your job. (6) If someone else's job is to teach you the gospel, it's your job to share your resources with your teacher. (7) Don't be confused: Papa has embraced you and included you in his life, but don't take that to mean that your actions no longer have consequences. Whatever kind of seed you plant in your

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Great Freedom . . . (cont.)

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garden, THAT is the plant that will grow there.

(8) If you seed your life with unhealthy thoughts and behaviors, you will reap a harvest of soul-disease. But if you plant in your life the knowledge and actions of the Holy Spirit, you will reap the infinite alive-ness He shares with Jesus and his Papa.

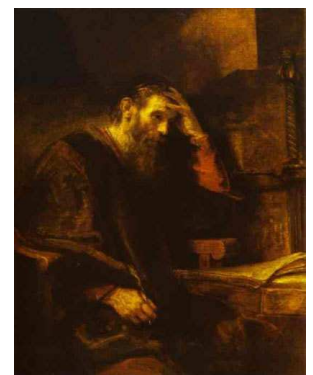
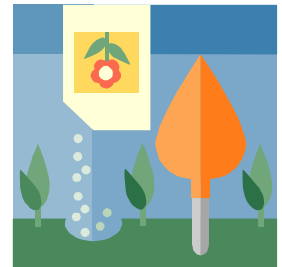
(9) That's why we keep on scattering seeds of compassion in the world, even though it's hard work, and even though it's hard to see the results sometimes. We have faith that good seeds grow into good plants. (10) That's why we take every opportunity to extend compassion to all people, starting with those in our own community.

(11) Holy cow! Check out my handwriting—Now you can see why I usually dictate my letters to a scribe! (12) Those guys who are trying to push you into wang surgery—they are just posers who are scared of bearing the cross of Jesus. (13) They don't really live by Torah; they just like bragging about their artificially sculpted wangs. They want you to undergo surgery so they can brag about YOUR wangs, and that's just weird.

(14) The only thing I brag about is the cross of Master Jesus. Because of the cross, the world cannot control me anymore, and I have lost all interest in controlling the world. (15) Because now I know that the things that divide us are nothing; but the new creation that unifies us is everything!

(16) Those who live by this truth will know the grace and peace of living as children of Papa. (17) From now on, don't let the religion-nazis make trouble for me. It doesn't matter whether or not my body has been marked by human surgery. Because my whole being has been marked by the wounds of Jesus.

(18) May your spirit overflow with the grace and peace of Master Jesus. AMEN.



St. Paul in Prison
by Rembrandt

~ John Stonecypher

Why I No Longer Call Myself an Evangelical

EΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ

I no longer call myself an “evangelical.” My denomination (Grace Communion International) is a part of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and I’m fine with that, but I personally no longer use that word to describe myself.

In a way I regret “losing” the word. It’s perfectly Biblical, coming from the New Testament Greek word for the good news of Jesus (the gospel, or the “evangel” in Greek.) And theologically the word has traditionally referred to those who emphasize this good news of Jesus, so much so that ministers as varied as Thomas Torrance and Billy Graham could all call themselves, in some sense, “evangelical.” But for sociological and theological reasons unique to American culture in the 21st century, I have decided to stop identifying myself with the evangelical movement.

First, the sociology: the word “evangelical” is now almost synonymous with the word “Republican” in our culture. This isn’t fair or accurate, but unfortunately it is an association that is firmly rooted in the psyche of the American public. *The Adopted Life* is not a political publication, so I won’t be discussing the good or the bad that I see in Republican party politics. The issue for me is not whether I am Republican, Democrat, or other - politically speaking. The issue is that I don’t want non-believers to assume something about my political outlook when they hear me identify myself with a particular theological position - in this case “evangelical.”

Voters who self-identify with the label “evangelical” have overwhelmingly supported the Republican party for almost two generations now in American politics. The media has taken notice of this fact and commented on it *ad nauseam*. The result is that if you tell people that you are an “evangelical” there is a good chance that they will also assume you vote Republican. If you assume that the Father, Son, and Spirit are Republican then this association is no big deal. If, on the other hand, you assume that the Father, Son, and Spirit have a healthy skepticism towards all human politicking, then this association is very disturbing. Since I don’t think God is a Republican, I don’t want my theology associated so closely with the Republican party.

Second, and more importantly, I have theological reasons for abandoning the word “evangelical.” Once again there is something unfair and inaccurate that has happened in our culture: the word “evangelical” has come to be associated with a number of very specific theological positions that don’t really reflect the broad use of the term “evangelical” in the history of the Church. In other words, there are a lot of ideas associated in our culture with the word “evangelical” that may represent what most, but not all, evangelicals believe. This leaves people like me either saying “I’m an evangelical, but not *that* kind of evangelical!” or simply abandoning the use of the word all together. I’ve decided it’s easier to just abandon the word all together.

Here, briefly, are some of the theological ideas that are associated with the word

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No Longer an Evangelical . . . (cont.)

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“evangelical” in our culture that I have a problem with:

An evangelical is someone who thinks that God wants to burn people up in hell for not believing the right things. Not everyone who calls himself an evangelical believes this, but there are plenty who do and that majority - if it is a majority - has defined the word in this way. I believe in hell, but I don't think it exists as a place for an angry God to get revenge on law breakers. I think hell is the misery we experience when we don't believe the truth that we are the adopted children of the Father in Jesus. I think we can leave hell anytime we want to. (See “Why I Believe in a Purgative Hell,” *The Adopted Life*, July, 2009.)

An evangelical is someone who wants to convert you to his religion in order to make you acceptable to God. Now, it's true, I would like for everyone to believe what I believe about the Father, Son, and Spirit because I think what I believe is true. But I also think that humanity is acceptable - and accepted - by the Father because of Jesus, not because of any change in our own thinking. In 21st century American culture, evangelicals sound like a group of people who are saying “God doesn't like you but you can get him to like you if you'll do what we tell you to do.” That's not the Trinity I believe in.

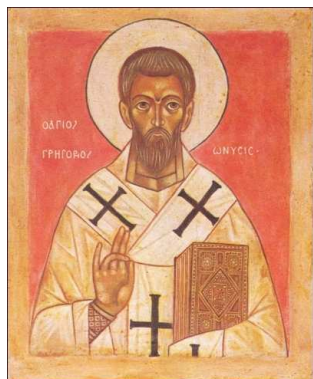
An evangelical is someone who wants to force everyone to follow his moral code even though he doesn't follow that code himself. I've concluded that most Biblical morality is impossible apart from knowing yourself as the beloved and adopted child of the Father in Jesus. Everything the Bible says about homosexuality, adultery, taking care of the poor, being honest, and loving other people, it says in the context of who Jesus is as our older brother who has made humanity into the Father's children. So, I think society is going to have whatever morality it chooses to have - partly inspired by the Bible and partly not. For example, American society in the 1920s at least made a pretense of embracing the Biblical morality of avoiding sex outside of marriage while at the same time deeply embracing the very un-Biblical morality of racism and segregation. Today, as then, our society embraces a moral code that both reflects and contradicts the Bible. I don't think these problems will be solved by lectures on morality. I think society needs the fearless declaration of the good news of their adoption in Jesus Christ. Since evangelicals are closely associated in the popular imagination with morality lectures, I no longer want to be associated with evangelicals.

None of this means that I don't like evangelicals or regard them as my brothers and sisters in the Church. I do. It just means that I've got to find a new way of describing myself in my Christian belief. For now I've decided to go with “Trinitarian.” Maybe it'll catch on.



~ Jonathan Stepp

Gregory of Nyssa on Epiphany



We're sometimes asked "Are you sure the adoption of humanity is the gospel? I've never heard it before." That's why we like to bring in the thoughts of various theologians from history to add to our understanding of the gospel.

The following passage is from an Epiphany sermon by Gregory of Nyssa, who lived in the 4th century:

Christ, then, was born as it were a few days ago—He Whose generation was before all things, sensible and intellectual. To-day He is baptized by John that He might cleanse those who were defiled, that He might bring the Spirit from above, and exalt humanity to heaven, that those who had fallen might be raised up and he who had cast them down [i.e. Satan] might be put to shame. And marvel not if God showed so great earnestness in our cause: for it was with care on the part of him who did us wrong that the plot was laid against us; it is with forethought on the part of our Maker that we are saved. . . Christ, the repairer of his [Satan's] evil-doing, assumes human nature in its fullness, and saves humanity, and becomes the type and figure of us all, to sanctify the first-fruits of every action, and leave to His servants no doubt in their zeal for the tradition [i.e. baptism]. Baptism, then, is a purification from sins, a remission of trespasses, a cause of renovation and regeneration. ~ *Oration On the Baptism of Christ*



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