

Sermon Text: Exodus 13:1-3a, 11-15

Occasion: First Sunday of Christmas, 26 Dec 2021

Heir of Creation

Grace, mercy and peace be to you in the name of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Let me tell you a story,

Nina was sitting in the pews in church. She had been a mother for less than a week at this point. It had all gone by so fast—except for the labour. That seemed to drag on for an eternity, but everything else seemed like a dream at this point. So, it felt like that a moment before she had been screaming in pain only to ease into silence as a small cry began to echo in the delivery ward. A young girl, Nina's first child, had come into the world to greet God's creation with a rosy face. The baby was not happy to be out of the womb. But Nina could only take it as a compliment. The child wanted to be back with her mother and, once the baby was wrapped up in her mother's arms, only then did she stop complaining.

Gazing into the tired face of this radiant little girl, Nina and her husband decided to name the baby in the spirit of the occasion. This child was born on Christmas Day so it was only fitting to call her Noelle. The joy of the Christmas season now not only contained the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ come to us, but Christmas now also marked God's gift of this child to Nina. How wonderful the Lord is for all the gifts that He gives to us, especially the gift of newborn hope and love. Such love was wrapped up in this little child for Nina.

Nina had been talking with her pastor throughout the pregnancy so the baptism of Noelle was set up quickly. This was the first Sunday after Noelle's birth on Christmas. Per usual, the baptism was at the beginning of the service and worship continued with the liturgy. There were so many feelings swept up in Nina and her husband as they witnessed their daughter being united to Christ's death to sin and life to God in the baptismal waters. Although they could not see the Holy Spirit descending as a dove or anything like that, they knew that God was at work in baptism for baby Noelle. This small child was now saved from sin, death, and the devil through the power of God.

The rest of the service that Sunday was a tad different from what Nina was expecting. The text the pastor chose that day to preach on was a reading from Exodus. It was the scheduled reading. Oddly enough, it was about how the firstborn children of humans and animals in the nation of Israel were to be consecrated to God at the tabernacle. Okay, but what does that have to do with baptism? Or Jesus? Well, the preacher started unravelling the text to help Nina and the rest of the congregation to understand things a bit better.

When promises and inheritances go through the family line in the Old Testament, it's always given to those who are firstborn. It is the carrying on of a legacy, the continuation of all the hard work of your parents, your grandparents, and all your forefathers. Everyone who has lived has eventually died, but that does not mean they did not bring about something helpful, something that would be valuable in the present day. Nina, as a young mother, was not really thinking about her eventual demise, although she had been praying that Jesus would come back before she would ever have to go to the grave. (Amen. Come Lord Jesus.) But if Nina should have to return to the dust from which she was made, she deeply desired her newborn baby not to suffer any unmet need.

She wanted little Noelle to be cared for, cherished, and given every opportunity she needs to be successful in this world. Nina is not simply working in this life for herself nor just for her husband. Nina is here in this world to care for all the people she meets, and this is especially true for the vulnerable person God entrusted to Nina as a mother on Christmas Day. The Lord Almighty had bestowed not only love and joy upon Nina through the gift of this child but a responsibility to care for this little girl who would inherit what her mother would be working her entire life to achieve.

Such is true also of God our Father. He has brought great things into existence for us. The creation of the world and everything in it is obvious enough. But we can also think of all the other things after the seven days of creation. There are plants, animals, property, and people with which our God has blessed us. He has also worked historical events for His people—the Flood, the Exodus, the conquest of the Holy Land, the birth of the world's Saviour. God has put all sorts of effort into His creation so that we may inherit great things from this creation because of our heavenly Father. Just as Nina desires for her child to receive all the good things Nina has worked and will work so hard to produce, so our Father in heaven desires we receive the blessings He has brought about and is bringing about for us. We need not fear want or doubt in this world because our God has promised us every good thing which we will receive through Christ. Those who went through the consecration ceremony in the Old Testament were to become heirs of God so all that the Lord has done would be given to them.

And this is where the preacher grabbed Nina back into the sermon. He proclaimed that Christ, who was born on Christmas Day just like baby Noelle, was brought into this world to be yet another way to care for those of us in creation. Like all the people and animals consecrated to God in the Old Testament, so Jesus was consecrated unto the Lord. Jesus was himself God, so it might seem odd that he needed to be consecrated to God. But Jesus did this to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus came into this world to be just like us who are to follow God's word, and that means doing everything a Jew at that time would do. This was so that those who share in all these ceremonies receive what Jesus receives.

Jesus is the true Son of God, born of his Father before all worlds. God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made. He is the one who will inherit all the Father's work. He is the one who receives all creation. It is due to him not only because of his lineage from the

Father but also because he is the sole person who is worthy to inherit creation. We are not worthy to inherit the creation of God because we have spoiled creation as we ourselves are spoiled in sin. We were placed in this world to properly take care of creation—the plants, animals, people, and everything else. Yet we have not done what we are supposed to do. We have forfeited the Father's gracious gift of life and the world through spoiling the great works of the Father. The Lord has weaved great things into history, as the Bible recounts. Humans have not quite done the same with our wars, crimes, and negligence. In your own personal history, your Lord sees what sins you have done against His will. As we have rejected our Lord and His creation through our sin, so the Lord has rejected us from receiving the creation as an inheritance. But Christ is not found guilty of any of our failures and therefore is not excluded from receiving the good things of God.

Christ is the true heir of all things and has received them upon his death at cross and at his resurrection. Truly, all that you see within this creation, and even all that is unseen in creation, belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ. But it does belong to us as well through Christ because when we were consecrated to God, we were joined to Christ's consecration to God. Jesus did not need to go through that Old Testament ceremony for himself but for us so we may join him.

True, we don't go through the exact ceremony that Jesus did at the temple in Jerusalem, but we have taken part in something greater than that ceremony. We have been baptized into Christ. Joined to his death and his resurrection, we are therefore heirs to the creation Christ received when he died and rose again. As baby Noelle was washed in the waters of baptism, she was ridded of her imperfect impacts on God's creation, and she was brought into the inheritance of Jesus Christ. Noelle became a child of God in that moment and therefore an inheritor of the promises of God, including the promise of receiving this creation made perfect on the Last Day.

Nina sat in the pew listening to this and began to reflect on her own baptism. Unlike her husband who was baptized as an adult convert to Christianity, Nina was baptized as a child. She could not remember the event no matter how hard she might try, although there was a lot of photographic evidence from her grandparents snapping dozens of pictures at the time. But despite her lack of memories of the actual event, the effects of her baptism live within her flesh.

Nina was consecrated unto her Lord in baptism. This is not some simple dedication ceremony where she was pledged to hopefully stay in the faith. Baptism offers so much more than that. It actually made her a child of God. It made her an heir and active partaker in the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The life she now lives she lives eternally in Christ. The Holy Spirit came upon her and dwells within her body even now as His temple, making her holier and holier in sanctification. Creation itself belongs to her and yearns for her to experience its blessings. And, in turn, as an heir of the creation, it is her duty to take care of it—to be a faithful steward of its gifts that she might do God's will for this world. And part of that proper stewardship is being a loving mother to her newborn child, raising her in the faith and reminding baby Noelle of her baptism into Christ through which the child also receives all things.

As Christ came under the Law to serve the Father and be a faithful heir, so we should serve our heavenly Father. Yet we know that we do not deserve to receive the blessings our God offers because of our sins. But we still rejoice in knowing that we have received Jesus Christ our Lord, born on Christmas Day, who is joined to us through faith and baptism that we may partake of the creation he has inherited. May he guard us in the faith by way of the word of God and the Holy Spirit that we may be found true heirs of creation on the Last Day, and receive paradise in Christ's name. Amen.

The peace that surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.