

ADVENT 4
ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
LOGANVILLE, GA
DECEMBER 24, 2023

**THIS IS MY BELOVED SON:
#4 – Jesus, the Perfect Son
(John 3:16-18)**

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and from Christ Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

In the journey through Advent, we've considered three sons from the Old Testament, each unfolding as an account of regret, casting shadows upon their fathers. These sons - Cain, Ishmael, and Absalom - emerged as bearers of profound sorrow, leaving their fathers bereft, unable to declare with satisfaction, "This is my son." What resonates, however, is the fathers' inability to find delight in their progeny.

It is crucial to fathom that the roots of this heartache are entwined with the actions of the fathers themselves— Adam, ushering sin and death into the world; Abraham, nonchalantly acquiescing to the temptation of fornication with Hagar; and David, neglecting the brewing problems that fueled Absalom's rebellious ambitions. In essence, the fathers, in their distinct ways, played pivotal roles in orchestrating the sorrow that befell their sons.

Comprehend, then, that the father-child relationship is a linchpin, influencing the emotional, social, and, notably, spiritual welfare of offspring. The repercussions of a father's shortcomings, evident not only in the sacred scriptures but also corroborated by numerous studies, are

manifest. The statistics stand as testaments to the indispensable role of a paternal figure in the lives of the majority of children, underscoring the profound impact of a father's virtues and moral lapses on the intricate fabric of familial existence.

In a profound investigation titled "What Can the Federal Government Do to Decrease Crime and Revitalize Communities?" emanating from the hallowed halls of the United States Department of Justice, an intricate web of connections between contemporary societal maladies and fatherless homes unraveled. The report on the absence of a paternal presence in a young individual's life offered stark revelations:

63 percent of youth suicides

90 percent of all homeless and runaway youths

85 percent of all children exhibiting behavioral disorders

71 percent of all high school dropouts

70 percent of juveniles inhabiting state-operated institutions

75 percent of adolescent patients grappling with substance abuse

Yet, a supplementary statistic accentuates this reality even more starkly. A staggering 90% or more of the youth who disengage from church activities have fathers who remain absent from the pews, irrespective of the frequency or intensity of their mothers' attendance. It's a stark declaration: children thrive when embraced and nurtured by a father who not only harbors love for them but is also

devoted to the divine, anchored in both love for the Lord and His sacred Word.

Even in the presence of a father, the trajectory of life is no guarantee of smooth sailing. Let's confront the truth: fathers bear an immense burden concerning the attitudes and decisions that shape their children's destinies. It follows, then, that fathers also shoulder a considerable share of the blame when their progeny veer into the murky waters of poor choices and life's struggles. Imperfection is the anthem of paternal existence; we fathers, being imperfect ourselves, usher in a legacy where our children, too, are destined to falter. A bit less than half of us currently play or will soon play the role of the imperfect father, while all of us, without exception, hail from imperfect fathers whose footsteps we unwittingly tread.

In the crucible of imperfection, the significance of what we commemorate during this season becomes strikingly apparent and irreplaceable for us, the progeny of Adam, seeking a flicker of hope in the face of our own inadequacies. There exists only one Son who embodies perfection, emanating from the embrace of the one flawless Father. In this Son, we secure the audacious right to claim that perfect Father as our own, wrapped in the blanket of forgiveness for our myriad sins. The sacred verses we contemplate today resound with wisdom, as found in John 3:16-18:

(ESV) "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but

have eternal life. (17) For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (18) Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

In this fractured world, brokenness pervades every facet of our existence — inoperable possessions, disintegrated bones, shattered dreams, and broken families. The term "broke" resonates not only in the realm of finances but mirrors the overarching theme of the human condition. When you utter the words, "I'm broke," in reference to your wallet and bank account, you're essentially acknowledging that, even in the financial microcosm of human existence, you're adhering to the fate of Adam's descendants — ensnared by the clutches of sin, navigating a tumultuous path laden with troubles, heartaches, and a trajectory toward our inevitable demise: death. It's a narrative we all share- we're broken.

For many, grappling with this stark reality is a considerable mental, emotional, and spiritual struggle. It's not simply a matter of recognizing its truth; it's about understanding the why. Why must we endure such pervasive brokenness? Atheism, offering a seemingly straightforward response, asserts that's just the way things are — life's a brief, tumultuous journey leading to an unremarkable end. Not only does this atheist viewpoint fail to provide comfort or hope, it also does nothing to alleviate the brokenness. Pain, heartache, and misery persist, leading to a demise that

offers nothing but emptiness. Thanks for nothing, literally, atheism.

What, then, about faith in God? How does it serve anyone, especially considering the biblical assertion that God is both benevolent and omnipotent? Why would such a God permit the relentless persistence of brokenness in the world? Why allow it to infiltrate the lives of those who entrust themselves to Him and call upon Him in prayer? Why not, as in the act of creation, simply utter, "Let there be joy, ease, an end to hurt, and an end to pain, the cessation of death"? These are profound questions, and grappling with them delves us into the very essence of our faith.

These questions have haunted the minds and hearts of humanity since the that intial plunge into sin. One can almost hear the echoes of Adam and Eve, locked in a heated debate, pondering why God even allowed them to have Cain, when the foreknowledge of his murderous act was in the air. Or, picture Abraham and Sarah, entangled in discussions about the necessity of expelling Ishmael, an illegitimate product of Abraham's extramarital affair with Hagar, Sarah's own servant, stirring heartache and turmoil within their own sacred union. The anguished cry of King David also reverberates, mourning the rebellious Absalom, who perished in a battle for the throne, "My son, my son, Absalom... I would have died for you... Why, oh why did my son, Absalom, have to die?" A litany of disappointments, an arsenal of heartaches!

The reconciliation of these and so many other disappointments and heartaches, inherent in the human experience, with the knowledge of a benevolent, all-powerful God remains elusive to us. The answer, it seems, is shrouded in uncertainty. What remains at the center of our Christian faith is encapsulated in two powerful emblems – a manger and a cross. These emblems convey the most profound truth: the God we worship and trust in is not distant or indifferent to the brokenness of our human existence. For the sake of love, He chose to immerse Himself into our misery, enduring it alongside us, and through it providing the sole remedy for our shattered existence. This act unfolded through the sending of His only-begotten Son into the world, who, through His holy life and sacrificial death, redeems us from the clutches of sin.

Firstly, there's the manger – not the sweet and comfy scene portrayed in Christmas carols but a rustic animal feed trough, a symbol of poverty and deprivation. Amidst the festivity of Christmas tunes, it's easy to miss the raw reality – it's a place where animals feasted with no regard for etiquette. It represents a harshness that most parents would find repulsive as a place in which to lay their newborn. Yet, God permits His only-begotten Son to be laid in this unsanitary and selfish setting, demonstrating His willingness to plunge to any depth, endure any poverty, and bear any injustice to rescue us from the pervasive brokenness of the world.

The second emblem, a formidable piece of wood, intricately shaped into the form of a cross, also bears the weight of profound significance. Here, our God and Lord weathered the full onslaught of brutality and horror unleashed by humanity upon itself, coupled with the unrelenting terrors and agonies of hell that we, in our cruelty and brutality, rightfully deserved. Let's not forget, while we often adorn ourselves with the cross as a trinket or embellish our homes with its symbol, the Romans conceived it as the quintessential instrument of supreme torture and death. There was nothing noble, decorative, or gleaming about it. It was a crucible for criminals to endure prolonged suffering before meeting the fate befitting their transgressions—death.

Yet, Jesus, God's Son, committed no crime and thus warranted neither death nor suffering. Despite this, He willingly embraced every iota of misery that the human race could muster against Him. More than that, He plunged Himself even deeper into our collective brokenness by shouldering His Father's righteous justice against the world's sin on His innocent body and soul. He absorbed the injustices of the world and took pleasure in satisfying God's justice against the world's sin and against all sinners.

In the intricate tapestry of human history as a whole and the narrative of each individual, there unfolds as a tale of children who persistently disappoint their heavenly Father. However, it is equally a narrative of a Father who, driven by profound love, pursues His wayward children with unwavering determination. The manger and the cross

weave a narrative of the only perfect Father-Son relationship. It is within this relationship that the key to true joy, peace, hope, and life are discovered. To transform us into true children of God, the Almighty sent His only-begotten Son into the world—the Son of Man and Son of God—assuming the role of the perfect Son, into our imperfection.

Jesus is the true Son of Adam who is the promised Seed foretold in Genesis 3, who committed no murder with his thoughts, words, or actions. Rather, he was murdered that we might live. Jesus is the true Son of Abraham, the One through whom all nations are blessed. Jesus is the true Son of David, the King of kings, who remained perfectly obedient to His heavenly Father, and yet became a curse for us by hanging from a tree.

Because of the gift of His Son, God reveals to us, in a shocking twist, that He is, in fact, our Father, who loves us and forgives us and gives us the right to become children of God. God adopts you and makes you part of His eternal family through your Baptism into Jesus. What God said to Jesus at His Baptism, God now says to you through yours: “This is My son. This is My daughter, with whom I am well pleased.” AMEN!