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People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Do you know the First Lady of France? Her name is Carla – with a "C" – Carle Bruni, hyphen Sarkozy – you're supposed to put the emphasis at the end – Carla Bruni-Sarkozy! The First Lady of France is friends with a homeless man who lives on the streets in the very ritzy neighborhood of Paris where the Sarkozys live. Carla is friends with this homeless man named Denis! Carla offered to put Denis up in a hotel – a very nice hotel, I'm sure. Denis said, "Thanks, but no thanks! I have my habits!" Do you understand that? I have my habits – my own way of doing things – and I don't want to give them up. It's like the people by Uncle Terry – in the Amazon Rainforest. When you drill for clean safe water – they prefer the filthy muddy river water they are used to. It's that way with us – if the truth be told. We like our old self-indulgent ways. We like to do what pleases us – not what we know is God's will for us. We are comfortable in our sins. The good news is – Jesus loves us with a powerful and determined love. Jesus did not *leave us as orphans*. He came into this world to rescue us from all our sins and mistakes.

This second Sunday after Christmas God's Word brings us powerful comfort and very practical encouragement:

God the Father Adopted You!

1. *You are no longer a slave but a son.*
2. *Since you are a son you are an heir.*

The part of God's Word we are concentrating – was written by the Apostle Paul to people living in Galatia – that is present day Turkey. People who live in Turkey – on the northern end of Iraq – are the Kurds! You hear about them from time to time on the news – the Kurds. They are a strong people – with dark skin – from being in the sun and out in the wind. The men very often have very handsome – thick moustaches – and very dark beards – and big brown eyes! Many of them are still today shepherds – keeping watch over their flocks by night. The Apostle Paul spent much of his ministry in Galatia – in cities like Ephesus, Colosse and Antioch. People who heard God's Word – who heard law and gospel shared it with their friends and relatives in places like Philadelphia, Laodicea, Thyatira and Pergamum! The letter to the people living in Galatia – uses a picture people back then were familiar with. That is the picture of a pedagogue – a slave who was responsible for the instruction – the education of the child – the son of his owner. The pedagogue would walk the student to school – sure he has the tools he needs to learn. The pedagogue would bring the student safely home – review the lesson – tutor the student as necessary – to make sure he understood. The pedagogue would be in charge – though he is a slave – and the student the son – the heir – until the heir is fully grown. That's how the law works. It comes first. It prepares – plows the soil – makes preparation for the Gospel! You always start with the law – then the Gospel. You always start with sin – then grace. You need to understand your dire situation – before you can appreciate your rescue. You need to understand the disease – before you understand and appreciate you need a physician for your soul! Understanding and rightly dividing/discerning law and Gospel is essential. We have said before – there is almost hard-wired into people this idea – be good and good things will happen to you. Be *bad* – and you get a lump of coal for Christmas! There is hard-wired into people this idea that in order to go to heaven – you have to *be good!* At least *pretty*

good – at least doing more good than evil! That’s just wrong! We are forgiven – by grace through faith – apart from observing the Law – apart from being good!

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law that we might receive the full rights of sons! About this time each year – there is lot of talk about looking back on the past 12 months. This past year – 2009 – there is even more talk about the fact this is the end of a decade. What has happened since the new millennium started? I think it’s safe to say most of the talk is pretty negative. That should come as no surprise. Some 3,000 years ago – wise King Solomon wrote – **All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, “See, this is new”? It has been already in the ages before us...** Ecclesiastes 1:8-10 Again and again small children are kidnapped – a ransom paid – and not long after that – their little broken body is discovered not far from the home where they were abducted. Charles Augustus Lindbergh, Jr. was kidnapped – March 1, 1932. It happened way back then – and it will happen in the future – again and again! The stock market has gone up and down and up and down – and it will into the future. There was war in 1812 and there will be wars and rumors of wars in 2012. *“The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up “sweets” at the table...and tyrannize their teachers.”* So said Socrates more than 400 years before the Christ child was born!

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” When you are really little – you learn how to talk. It isn’t easy. You have big people all around you – talking all the time. They ask you very complicated questions – often multiple choice questions about what you want to do – or what you want to eat – or where does it hurt? It’s all very confusing. On the other hand – people who really love you like your mom and dad – often understand what you mean – even when no one else does. When my grandson was really little – “burf” was what he said when he meant juice. I picked that up very quickly. I would ask him all the time if he wanted some burf – and usually he did. We would even bump our glasses – toasting burf! Abba is a word like that. Abba is what you say – like mama or papa or umpa and uma when you are too little to say grandma and grandpa. Abba – Father! King David wrote about this is Psalm 8. **O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. From the lips of nursing babies, infants, toddlers and small children you have ordained praise...** A thousand years later Jesus reminded the Pharisees, the chief priests – the teachers of the law – when they complained holy week – about the people praising him – singing by the Temple--**Hosanna to the Son of David!** Babies and infants will praise their Savior and Redeemer! Matthew 21:15f

So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. Jesus talked about the difference between a slave and a son – on the night he was betrayed – on the way from the upper room to the Garden of Gethsemane – where he would be arrested. Jesus said, **“I no longer call you servants/slaves, because a servant/a slave does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last... John 15:15f** There is a wondrous freedom that comes from being a child of God. In this world they are forever making new laws – new rules and regulations. Beginning January 1st in Illinois – if you are a bowling alley – and you have a sign that says it’s dangerous to wear your bowling shoes *outside* – you can’t be sued! God’s Word talks about the danger that comes from a greedy self-centered heart – that wants to take people to court to make them give you money. Jesus talked about it. The Apostle Paul warned the Corinthians about it. Police can seize your disable parking permit if you misuse it. God’s Word says, **“Love one another!”** When you love each other – people who are strong and well, by the grace of God – won’t snatch handicapped parking – won’t text when they need to watch where they are driving. We will not be using our cell phones – not only by schools and construction zones – where there is increased danger already! We won’t use our cell phones at any time that puts other people in danger! People who have an order of protection against them aren’t supposed to have guns! *Really?* Something has gone horrible wrong when police officers and courts have to say – it’s against the

law for you to go anywhere near whom – people who are members of your own family? We don't need more and more and more human laws. We need new hearts – hearts of faith – that understand what Jesus meant when he said, “**As I have love you – so you must love one another!**” We need the kind of heart that follows Jesus' example of washing other people's feet! We need a shepherd's heart – that loves your sheep! We need constant Gospel strength and encouragement to live like children of our Heavenly Father!

And since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. We are heirs of eternal life! That means we are safe – *eternally* safe! I read the other day about people called *prep-ers*. That's a word for people who are forever preparing – getting ready – getting ready for some sort of terrible disaster. They prepare their car in case they have an accident – a crash – in case they hit some black ice and go skidding off the road – down an embankment. They have that On-star thing – that sends out a signal of the air bags deploy. They have in their trunk a shovel – some sand and some salt. They have blankets – something to drink – something to eat – flares. They have a First Aid kit – they know how to do CPR – they know how to stop bleeding. What to do to prevent your going into shock! There are people stock piling fire wood – stock piling dried fruits and salted meat – food that is preserved if the power grid goes down. They have guns and ammunition and they know all kinds of self-defense! They are prepared to survive – should there be a terrible natural disaster – to survive if government, law and order should break down and there is absolute anarchy. That would all be a pretty scary thought – were it not for the fact that God is our Father! We are heirs – heirs of God – and co-heirs with Christ. It's fine if you want to be prepared for emergencies. But the biggest threat is to our faith and to our immortal soul. Our souls are safe for Jesus' sake. He died and rose again – so that our inheritance is safe in heaven. Nothing will spoil or corrupt our eternal inheritance!

I read in the *Watertown Daily Times* – on-line an article that said, “No one I know makes New Year's resolutions anymore. In part this may be because the resolutions often deal with our weaknesses – lose weight, quit smoking – so that when we fail, we *resolve to stop resolving* rather than be reminded of our inability to keep them.” That could be. We don't like to admit failures – weaknesses – shortcomings of any kind! Most of the time we try not to admit our failures and weaknesses – even to our self! Part of growing up and growing in Christ – is to look long and hard into the mirror of the law – and see those weaknesses and shortcomings. Then to know our sins are all forgiven. And then – with the power of the Gospel to change! Only Jesus can make you strong enough – through the power of the Gospel to bear the sweet fruits of faith that give glory to God. This new year – show more and more **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control** that reflect Jesus' love. Again – this new year – the point is not *niceness*! Unbelievers can put on this veneer of niceness. The point is glorifying God – with everything you say and do. The point is glorifying God all the time. And though you will undoubtedly bump into cynics – cold and discouraged – who say nothing ever changes – know that Jesus' forgiving love changes everything. When Jesus warms your heart – all kinds of changes are possible. Jesus has already changed us **from death to life**. Jesus makes powerful changes possible in all our lives – for his glory alone. Amen!

To God alone all glory!



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