

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Ash Wednesday
February 22, 2023
Lord's Prayer Introduction

Our Father, Who Art in Heaven

Our Father who art in heaven.
What does this mean?

With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.

Dearly Beloved in Christ:

Prayer is one of the Lenten disciplines, along with fasting and almsgiving. Indeed, it is a necessary and vital part of a Christian's life. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us, "When you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them . . ." (Matt. 6:7-8 NKJV). Jesus then gives us the model for prayer that we call the Lord's Prayer. But how easily those words slip off the tongue without our thinking what they mean. How easy it is to recite those words as "vain repetitions" or "empty phrases." Therefore, we will use these mid-week Lenten services to review the Lord's Prayer so that we can pray it properly and with understanding. Tonight, we consider the Introduction, "Our Father who art in heaven. What does this mean? With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father."

How marvelous those words are! "Our Father." Have you ever taken the time to think about those words? Have you ever wondered how it is that sinners such as we could possibly address the Holy God as "Father"? The key, of course, is the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He is the one who teaches us to call His Father "Our Father."

By calling God "Father" we are confessing that we are His children. We are saying that we are in this family together. We are praying with and for each other. But how can this be? Does our calling Him "Our Father" make it so? No. Rather, we call Him our Father because He has chosen us to be His children. Consider what God Himself has told us, "I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:18). "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are." (1 John 3:1). We are God's children because He has made us His children.

So, how does God make us His children? By adoption. You see, because of sin we are alienated from God. We are by nature children of wrath. We deserve nothing but God's anger

and punishment. If left to ourselves we would remain homeless and hopeless. But because of God's love for us, He sent His only Son to become one of us and one with us. His Son took on human flesh. Jesus became our brother so that we could call God, "Father."

When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" (Gal. 4:4-6).

"You received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs -- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (Romans 8:15-17).

In our baptism we were brought into God's family. In Baptism we have been adopted into the family of God through Christ's death and resurrection. Our Baptism, our adoption, is not our work. It's God's! He did everything necessary for us to become His children. We didn't choose Him; He chose us. There may be unplanned pregnancies, but there are no unplanned adoptions. They are intentional. The parents choose the child, not the other way around. The parents go to great lengths to bring that child into their family. They spare no expense. The child doesn't deserve such kindness. The child doesn't earn their love. Rather it is given freely and in abundance. Adoption is a gift one receives, not a feat one achieves.

So it is with us. Because of sin we were orphans with no hope. But God chose us from the beginning of the world to be His children. He went to great expense to bring us into His family. He sent His own Son to die on the cross in order to pay the price for our adoption. And in Holy Baptism we receive the guarantee that we are His children. When our sins were washed away we became the children of God. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:3-5). With nothing good in us, God adopted us simply because He loves us.

But we don't always act like His children, do we? Too often, we act as if we don't have or need a father. Yet, like the prodigal son, we are led to repent and return to our Father, and He receives us with open arms. So it is that in prayer, we return to our Father's home again and again. "Our Father, who art in heaven." That's our home. That's our inheritance. David wrote, "One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek; That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple" (Psalm 27:4). Psalm 23 declares the confidence that belongs to a child of God, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Heaven is our home, because it's our Father's home.

Indeed, we have a heavenly Father because He has chosen us to be His children through Jesus Christ. He invites us to come to Him and talk to Him. More than that, He commands us to pray. He wants us to call on His name "in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks." Furthermore, He promises to hear us and help us with all our needs. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you." (Ps, 50:15). Jesus tells us, "Ask, and it will be given to you; . . . For everyone who asks receives. . . ." (Matt. 7:7-8). Though He knows what we need even before we ask, He wants us to ask so that we may learn to depend on Him in all situations and receive His blessings as the gifts they are. Indeed, He is more willing to give than we are to ask or receive. "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb. 4:16).

Thanks be to God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener