

## ***Christmas I Sermon 2 by Bishop Michael Hawkins***

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By the Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins

Bishop of Saskatchewan

Christmas is about family, but what kind of family?

Today is sometimes called Holy Family Sunday. And I worry that when we look on Jesus, Mary and Joseph, we imagine a picture-perfect family. Is this your view of Christmas, and of Jesus, Mary and Joseph?

You know those perfect family pictures people used to send out. Now it is more often the Christmas e-mail. Tommy is a Rhodes Scholar, Julie cannot decide between taking the New York job with Microsoft or going back to her volunteer work with the endangered emperor penguins in Antarctica, and we are busy keeping up with the ski chalet, the summer cottage and the city condo. We used to get one of those perfect photos from wealthy family friends every year, but they stopped coming after

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the breakdowns and divorces had complicated things.

If that picture-perfect family is not your family or your experience of family at Christmas, if your family Christmas letter would more honestly read, “we’re barely holding together, money’s tight, health’s a worry, Sue is struggling to cope after the bitter divorce, we still miss Sonny but he will be out of jail next year, Tom is doing better having come out of the closet, Bob still drinks too much and we haven’t heard from Tanya in three years,” then take heart.

The Holy Family was not picture-perfect. We have an old man, a teenage unwed mother, and this baby, at least from Herod’s and the world’s point of view an unwanted pregnancy. They are without home or work, obviously a little shunned from the rest of their family, they will be hunted by the authorities, the three of them will spend a couple of years as refugees, and

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the family closet or tree was full of murderers, rapists, and idolaters.

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Now Jesus is perfect, perfect God and perfect man, yet he was not born into a perfect world, or family, or circumstances. The truth of the incarnation is that God, the one and only, has hungered, thirsted, walked, been scared, wept, loved and was loved, was betrayed by friends, felt lonely, had a dysfunctional family, was hated, hurt and died. God has seen it all with human eyes.

We think about Christmas today in terms of adoption and redemption. Why did God send his Son to be born of a woman, to redeem and to adopt, to redeem us and to adopt us as his children? This is the message of both our Epistle and Gospel. His name is Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.

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His name is Emmanuel, God with us. In Jesus the Saviour, we have redemption. In Emmanuel, God with us, we are adopted.

Paul refers us to two great divides and infinite gulfs. We are separated and distinguished from God as creature from Creator, and as sinner from Holy. The atonement or at-one-ment, our being at one with God, means bridging this chasm, and since the divide is infinite, only an infinite being could bridge the gap. In the Saving Incarnation and Death of Jesus Christ, God has adopted his creatures as his children and redeemed sinners. He was born the Only Son, but he shares this. He would not remain the one and only, but rather is the first-born. He died the righteous one, but he would not remain so, and thus shares his righteousness with us. Rebellious servants become redeemed children through the gift of Jesus Christ, who was born and died for us. This is the Gospel.

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We are forgiven children, and God is our Father through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit. For what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, adopted and redeemed us, he convinces us of this by the sending of the Holy Spirit into our hearts. God owns us as his children, and we own him as our Father; and so we say, "Our Father. " These are not just old words, but what comes welling up from the deepest conviction of our hearts.

When we say Our Father in this service, it is as the adopted and forgiven children of God, and we are assured of this in the Holy Communion of Jesus' body and blood. This is the Father's "welcome home" banquet for his prodigal children. In it, we are assured of his favour and goodness towards us, that we are adopted through Jesus, the Word become flesh and blood, and forgiven through Jesus whose body was given and whose blood was shed for us. We are assured in Holy Communion that there

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is a place for us at the family table here and always, now and for ever.

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It is about the family of God, the Holy Catholic Church, the body of Christ, and this new and other family is itself not yet perfect. It's full of all sorts, many criminals and adulterers, the weak and the broken, foolish and despised. What kind of family is this? This is the family of those who will accept adoption and redemption through Jesus Christ. This is the family of the forgiven children of God. The Church is the family of God, and our purpose is to draw all people together into this family. It is not a closed family, for we are all only members by adoption, and it is not a perfect family, for we are all only members by forgiveness.

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the Holy Family wasn't picture-perfect. Joseph almost divorced Mary, my Family isn't perfect, and our Church family isn't perfect. And yet God used and uses these as means of his presence with us and salvation.

What kind of family is Christmas about? Open and forgiving. Christmas is about family, the Holy Family, and the holiness even of our broken struggling families, and THE Holy Family, the Family of God, of his adopted and forgiven children. And if God so owns and forgives us as his children, so we are bound to accept and forgive one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, in the family of God.