

Abba, on this night when you sent your Son into the world, help us to focus on the true reason why we are celebrating tonight and tomorrow.

### *Dads Are Important*

A father's relationship with his children is incredibly important to their emotional and social well-being. The negative effects of a child without a father can be seen in countless studies and reports. The statistics show the importance of a father figure in most children's lives.

According to the Department of Justice, children from fatherless homes account for:

- 63 percent of youth suicides
- 90 percent of all homeless and runaway youths
- 85 percent of all children that exhibit behavioral disorders
- 71 percent of all high school dropouts
- 70 percent of juveniles in state-operated institutions
- 75 percent of adolescent patients in substance abuse centers <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Justice Programs, "What Can the Federal Government Do to Decrease Crime and Revitalize Communities?" <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/172210.pdf>, 1998.

Children do best when they know and are raised by both a father and a mother.

But even when dad is present, it doesn't mean that everything will be OK. Authors and screenwriters have often recognized the complex relationship that often exists between fathers and sons and have used those tensions to create powerful stories.

When Darth Vader revealed to Luke that he was, in fact, Luke's father, it was the most shocking father-son moment since . . . well, probably 2,000 years beforehand in the Jordan River when Jesus was baptized, and God himself announced, "This is My Son, with whom I am well pleased."

How many other movies can you think of that revolve around the relationship between fathers and sons? I can think of *The Godfather*, a story really about sons trying to not disappoint fathers, *Finding Nemo*, a story about an overprotective father and a wayward son; and *The Lion King*, another story about a son who feels like he can't live up to his father's expectations.

Based on our own storytelling, we humans know both how important fathers are and how difficult our relationships with them can be.

In our midweek Advent series this year, we have explored three different father-and-son relationships found in the Old Testament, all of which ended in disappointment and/or in tragedy.

Cain, the son of Adam, was not the promised Savior that Adam and Eve hoped that he would be. Rather, he continued in his father's sin, becoming the first man among many who would strike out and kill his own brother, Abel.

Ishmael, the son of Abraham, was not the promised son either. Abraham and Sarah thought that they had to take matters into their own hands in order to produce an heir for Abraham. But they soon learned the folly of not trusting fully in God and trying to produce on their own what only God could do.

Absalom, the son of David, despite his father's great love for him, ended up disappointing his father as well, rebelling against him and losing his life in the process.

All these stories, both biblical and modern, help point us to the most complicated father-son relationship of all time. It's the story of God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth, and the children He created, the sons of men.

This is our story.

Though we desperately need the presence of our loving heavenly Father in our lives, we have rejected Him time and time again through our sinful and foolish ways.

Like Cain, we have not lived up to the expectations given to us in the Ten Commandments and have become murderers through our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. Like the story of Ishmael, we have tried to take matters into our own hands, thinking that our good works will earn God's love and favor. But our efforts are doomed to fall short and drive us further away from God. Like

Absalom, we have rebelled against our heavenly Father and King, wanting to rule our own lives instead. But this will only lead to death and condemnation.

Rather than trust in our heavenly Father's guidance, which is always wise and good, we prefer to place our trust in political figures, or military might, or in ourselves to find salvation in this life. Rather than listen to the truth that our heavenly Father speaks to us, we prefer to listen and place our confidence in the opinion of others.

Our story is a story of wayward and stubborn children who have a Father who is even more stubbornly pursuing us out of His great love.

It is a story perfectly captured by Jesus in His parable of the prodigal son.

I'm sure you know this story well. The younger son of a wealthy and generous father demanded his share of the inheritance. He may as well have said to him, "I wish you were dead already so I

can have your stuff!” With his words, he murdered like Cain. With his actions, he rebelled like Absalom. Yet even more shockingly, the father gives his son what he wants. He allows him to walk away and out of his life.

Yet the father never stops looking for his son and hoping and praying that he will return. Though he had every reason to be, he was not angry at his son. He simply wanted another opportunity to show him how much he loved him. And finally, when the son had wasted all of his father’s money and found himself at the end of his rope, his father got the chance to demonstrate just how great his love was for his son.

The prodigal son knew he did not deserve his father’s love or even a spot in the family again. He merely wanted to return as a servant. Perhaps he could work his way back in. With his focus on his own works, he became like Ishmael.

But his father would have none of it. Before he can even speak, the son is embraced tightly, clothed in the finest robe and sandals, and given the family ring, a symbol of his status as a son of the

father. A celebration is planned, a fattened calf is sacrificed, and the son who once was lost has been found, the son who once was dead is alive again.

This story begs the question: how could the father love his son like this? How could he just receive him back as if he had done nothing wrong? And would God do the same for us? These are questions that are answered by the story of Christmas.

All of Scripture tell the tale of the only perfect Father-Son relationship that has ever existed. Their relationship existed since before time began and will continue throughout eternity.

It is a relationship that is proclaimed in many of the Christmas songs we sing, such as:

- “Of the Father’s love begotten ere the worlds began to be,  
He is Alpha and Omega, He the source, the ending He” (*Of the Father’s Love Begotten, LSB 384:1*).
- “Silent night, holy night! Son of God, love’s pure light” (*Silent Night, Holy Night, LSB 363:3*).

- “Son of the Father now in flesh appearing!” (*O Come, All Ye Faithful, LSB 379:2*).
- “Now through His Son doth shine the Father’s grace divine.” (*Now Sing We, Now Rejoice, LSB 386:3*).

And many other that I won’t even try to sing. It is a story that is told in the first chapter of John’s Gospel:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, He has made Him known. (John 1:1–2, 14, 18; emphasis added)*

God the Father knows how much we need Him, despite our rejection of Him. We need to know our Father. It is the only way to find true joy, peace, hope, and life. **And to make us children of God, God sent His only-begotten Son into the world—the**

## **Son of Man and Son of God—to be the perfect Son that we could never be.**

*"When the fullness of time had come," Paul explains, "God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4–5, emphasis added).*

Jesus is the true Son of Adam who is the promised Seed foretold in Genesis 3 and who committed no murder with his thoughts, words, and deeds. Rather, he was murdered that we might live.

Jesus is the true Son of Abraham, the One who would bless all nations, by taking our salvation into His hands and giving to us His righteousness.

Jesus is the true Son of David, the King of kings, who remained perfectly obedient to His Father, and yet became a curse for us by hanging from a tree.

Psalm 146 reminds us: “Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish (Psalm 146:3–4). But Jesus is both the Son of Man and Son of God, the Prince of Peace, and when His breath departed, God’s plan of salvation was complete—God and sinners reconciled.

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 us and makes us part of His eternal family through our Baptism into Jesus. What God said to Jesus at His Baptism, God now says to you and me: “This is My son. This is My daughter, with whom I am well pleased.”

We are not fatherless children. We don’t have an absentee Father. Though we don’t deserve it, we have a perfect relationship with our Father who has given up His only begotten Son for us and who will always love us, care for us, and shield us with His presence, just like a good Father should do.

“All this for us our God has done granting love through His own Son. Therefore, all Christendom, rejoice. And sing His praise with endless voice. Alleluia!” (*We Praise You, Jesus, at Your Birth, LSB* 382:7).

AMEN