

**Wednesday, December 19, 2018 – Advent Midweek III/Elementary Christmas Program
“Chosen Children”**

John 1:12b

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV
Verse by Verse Structure

Adapted from CSL “The Word Became Flesh”

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

Between 1854 and 1929 over 200,000 orphans in cities like New York, Boston and Philly were placed on trains and shipped west, across the United States. These trains would periodically stop for viewings. Viewings? Children would be lined up like cattle at an auction. Potential parents would ask questions, evaluate health and often examine children’s teeth. If chosen, the children had a home. If not, they got back on the train—the Orphan Train.

Lee Nailing was on the Orphan Train. You can read about it in a book called *The Orphan Train Rider: One Boy’s True Story*. Lee was eight years old when, along with his two younger brothers, his dad took him to a train station in New York City. Lee’s dad gave him an envelope that had in it his dad’s name and address. Lee’s dad told him to write as soon as he reached his final destination. When Lee Nailing got off the train in Texas the envelope was gone. I wish I could tell you that Lee’s father found him. That Lee’s father sold the farm so he could reunite with his family. I’d love to describe that moment when Lee heard his father say, “Son, it’s me. I came for you!” But I can’t because that didn’t happen.

But your Father in heaven comes looking for you. That’s the point of John 1:12. Your Father in heaven comes looking for you. Do you feel like you’re stuck on the Orphan Train? Have you been rejected, time after time? That might be how you feel. But feelings are not facts! These are the facts:

Your Father in heaven comes looking for you! Biblical authors sometimes place their most important information in the middle. The meat is in the middle! In Genesis 11:1–9 (the Tower of Babel) the middle is Genesis 11:5, “The Lord came down.” In Isaiah chapters 2 through 12 the middle is Isaiah 7:14, “You shall call his name Immanuel.” Smack-dab, right in the middle of John 1:1–18 are these words. “He gave authority to become God’s children.” (John 1:12b) Let’s unpack this promise!

He. Who is the “he”? He is our heavenly Father. In John 1:1–18 our heavenly Father creates the universe through the Word—Jesus. And then he sends John the Baptist to tell us

about Jesus. And then our heavenly Father gives us the Word made flesh—Jesus—who is full of grace and truth, through him we receive one blessing after another. “He” is our loving Father.

Gave. Leading up to age 16, I assumed that I’d be getting a car. My parents’ stock reply was, “You’ll get a car when you can pay for a car.” Getting a car was my job, not theirs. But then my Mom got a new car, and her old car would become mine when I could drive. It was so ridiculous looking but to me, so, so beautiful – a 1992 Chevy Lumina minivan, you know, shaped like a Dustbuster. But there were no payments, no loans, no questions, and no hassles – just pay for my gas. My parents gave me a car!

Earthly fathers give. How much more our heavenly Father! John 3:34, “The Father gives the Spirit without limit.” John 5:21, “The Father raises the dead and gives them life.” John 16:23, “My Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.” And then the most amazing of them all, John 3:16, “God so loved the world that he gave...”

But what if God changes his mind? What if God reverses his plan? We all know that he has every reason to do so. We stumble. We fall. We lack. We sin. We rebel. And we mess things up. Will God finally have enough of us? Spouses do. Employers do. Friends do. Coaches kick players off the team. Principals expel students from school. Parents abandon their children at train stations—just ask Lee Nailing. How do we know God won’t do the same? After all, he is holy and pure and just and righteous and we are anything but. Put all fear aside, because he gave...

Authority. The disease has gone on for far too long. It has infected and killed countless people. It brings with it abandoned dreams and empty hearts. The disease I’m talking about goes by two god-forsaken words—*“I can’t.”* It attacks self-control: “I can’t resist the bottle.” It attacks marriages: “I can’t forgive.” It attacks nerves: “I can’t find peace.” It attacks faith: “I can’t believe.” “I just can’t!” “He gave authority.” Authority! We’re not helpless and hopeless. We are not powerless and without a prayer. “He gave authority.” One writer defines the Greek word, *exousia*, authority, with these words—“legitimate power from a competent source.” Legitimate power enables us to slam the door on “I can’t” and say, “I can!” Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength!” And the competent source giving us the power is almighty God! He gave authority...

To Become God's Children. Jesus teaches that we are born again and become God's children through water and the Spirit. We call that Holy Baptism. We might think of baptism like a car wash. You go in a filthy clunker and you come out with your sins washed away—a cleaned-up clunker. True. We're no longer defined by our divorce, our deficiencies, our debt, or our dumb choices. But there's more.

That ridiculous looking high mileage minivan, is exchanged for a brand-new Ferrari. That means the interior is new. So are the tires. And so are the doors and windows. In fact, everything is new! We are not clunkers anymore! That's why Jesus teaches that when people are baptized they are born again. When you are baptized you get a new you!

But there's even more. In Holy Baptism God also adopts you into his family. And adopted children are chosen children. That's not the case with biological children. When the doctor handed Derek Klemm to Fred Klemm, my father had no "Plan B." No loophole. No choice. No exit strategy. He couldn't give me back to the doctor and ask for a better-looking, smarter, or more athletic son.

But if you were adopted, your parents *chose* you. Surprise pregnancies happen. But surprise adoptions? I've never heard of one. If you were adopted your parents could've picked a different gender, a different color, or a different nationality. But they didn't. They chose you. They wanted you. So does your heavenly Father. Remember? He comes looking for you! "You have received the Spirit of adoption as children, by whom we cry, 'Abba! [Abba!] Father!'" (Romans 8:15) The heavenly Father doesn't adopt us because of our talent, our temperament, our taste, or our tattoos. He adopts us because he loves us.

And we all know that adoption isn't cheap. People spend tens of thousands of dollars to adopt just one child. What did God pay to adopt us? The cost was astronomical. It cost him everything. It cost him his only Son—Jesus. Jesus who died. Jesus who lives. Jesus who loves!

Remember Lee Nailing? The eight-year-old orphan whose father never came looking for him? Lee's two other brothers were chosen, but not Lee. Lee was stuck on the Orphan Train for four months—four miserable, monotonous months! Finally, finally, with his little heart ready to break, Lee was adopted by a tall Texas man and his short, sweet wife. The next day they introduced Lee to their friends with these words—"This is our new son, Lee."

Sometimes we ask, "Do I count for anything?" Everything from high school to old age leaves us feeling rejected. We push back. We try to validate our existence. We do more. We buy more. We achieve more. We get more. But we still wonder, "Do I count for anything?"

Yes you do! You are not stuck on the Orphan Train! Lee Nailing's story is a true story and so is yours! It's a true story! How so? John 1:12, "He gave authority to become the children of God!" You are baptized! The past is past. The future is bright. God's Word is sure. Rest in your adoption. You are his chosen child! Amen.