

***Galatians 4:4-7 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son to be born of a woman, so that he would be born under the law, <sup>5</sup> in order to redeem those under the law, so that we would be adopted as sons. <sup>6</sup> And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts to shout, “Abba, Father!” <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but a son. And if you are a son, then you are also an heir of God through Christ.***

*Hark the glad sound!  
The Savior comes,  
The Savior promised long;  
Let ev’ry heart prepare a throne  
And ev’ry voice a song.*

I hesitate to even bring it up, especially when so many of us aren’t able to be with family this year, but there it is. There is a glad sound each Christmas that quickens our heartbeats, lifts our spirits, raises our anxiety, sends cats scurrying and dogs a-barking. It’s not the sound of a jingle bell that does all this. No, it’s the sound of a doorbell...as holiday celebrations begin. Hark! The glad sound.

I’m sure you know what I mean, even if your Christmas tradition hasn’t included a houseful of family. Yet for so many of us, that’s what Christmas is all about: family. While we may be especially missing it this year, one of those glad sounds of the season is the doorbell ringing as family arrives to celebrate the holidays.

We love it! The festivities, the food, the games, the singing, the roaring fires, and catching up. I mean, Andy Williams is right, isn’t he?

*It’s the hap-happiest season of all  
With those holiday greetings*

*and gay happy meetings  
When friends come to call  
It’s the hap-happiest season of all...*

...isn’t it?

Of course, the arrival of family is not all painted candy canes and sugared plums. Let’s be honest, once the door bell rings, the chaos begins, too. I mean, as person after person walks through the door bearing gifts and hugs and greetings and food, they also come with their personalities and challenges and idiosyncrasies and opinions and criticisms and complaints. Actually, now that I say it, I don’t know if that Christmas doorbell *is* necessarily a glad sound to *everyone*.

But family is family and there’s nothing you can do about. For example, I know of a family that has an adoptive brother. He’s one of these guys that’s always right. No matter what you say, you can’t prove him wrong. You know what I mean?

Oh, he’s always willing to help, but if you ask him to do something, he seems to mostly just do his own thing his own way.

And he talks about himself...a lot – what he used to do, what he’s doing now, what he’s going to be doing – on and on.

And if all of that isn’t annoying enough, if he isn’t talking about himself, he’s talking about other people – what they used to do, what they’re doing now, and (most annoyingly) what they *ought* to be doing.

In fact, about the kindest thing one of his closest family members could say about him was that he’s out of his mind. But what can you do? Family is family. Christmas is Christmas. And when the doorbell rings, you open the door wide and welcome them in.

But what if I told you that the seemingly crazy, self-absorbed, do-it-my-own-way guy is Jesus? You see, ***when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son.*** In a manner of speaking, the scheduled time

arrived, the doorbell rang, the door flew open and Jesus arrived, **born of a woman, so that he would be born under the law, in order to redeem those under the law (you and me), so that we would be adopted as sons**, made part of God's family.

*He comes the captives to release,  
In Satan's prison held.  
The gates of brass before him burst;  
The iron fetters yield.*

Yes, our seemingly crazy, self-absorbed, do-it-his-own-way brother Jesus? There's a reason he's always right. He's God. There's a reason he's always willing to help, he's the ultimate servant. There's a reason he talks about himself, he's the only way to heaven. There's a reason he tells you about yourself, he's your brother, your adoptive brother, who loves you with every fiber of his being.

*He comes the broken heart to bind,  
The bleeding soul to cure,  
And with the treasures of his grace  
To enrich the humble poor.*

Yes, before his arrival, we were bleeding, broken, captive, parentless slaves. No home. No family. No purpose. No comfort. No joy. But the doorbell rang. The door flew open. And Jesus arrived not *because* we were family, but to *make* us family. This Jesus, this Christ-child, arrived in the flesh as one of us, grasping in his hands the adoption papers that makes him one with us, offering an eternal inheritance that he has won for us, and making himself at home in us... **because you are sons...** **Yes, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts to shout, "Abba, Father!"<sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but a son. And if you are a son, then you are also an heir of God through Christ.**

Hymn writer and pastor Philip Doddridge was the son of an oil merchant in 18<sup>th</sup> century London. He was the youngest of 20 children, but one of only two which survived infancy. His father was a nonconformist Christian – a Protestant that didn't conform to the Church of England - Baptists, Methodists, Calvinists, and in this case, Congregationalists. His maternal grandfather was a Lutheran minister who had fled to England from Prague to escape persecution.

Doddridge would grow up to enter ministry but his family influences – his siblings, his separation from others, his grandfather's persecution - would follow him. He married, but only 4 of his 9 children outlived him. It left him with a longing for the lost and a desire to help children. At the urging of his good friend and famed hymnwriter Isaac Watts (one of which is Joy to the World), Philipp opened his own academy to train young scholars for ministry as well as a charity school for the underprivileged. He even started a militia – brothers in arms – to protect his community during a time of threatened revolt.

Yes, family was important to Philip Doddridge. And it is Doddridge who wrote *Hark! The Glad Sound*. He knew the value of family. But even more importantly, he knew the value of being in God's family, thanks to our brother, this Christ-child, Jesus. Because of him, we can call God our dear Father, even as he calls us his dear children. Hark! The glad sound. The Savior has come.

In Doddridge's day, new hymns were taught by repetition from the pulpit. As our closing prayer, please, repeat after me:

*Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace,  
Your welcome shall proclaim,  
And heav'n's eternal arches ring  
With your beloved name. Amen.*