Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

The Apostles’ Creed was originally used as a kind of profession of faith statement before baptism. Because people were baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, this Creed allowed the person being baptized the opportunity to profess their faith in terms of the persons and works of God, the Father Almighty, Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit. And in its earliest form, it was being used as far back as AD 150. But it kept getting tweaked and refined and the form that we have it probably comes from the late sixth or early seventh century.

Now, I reckon we recite the Apostles’ Creed around 40 times a year in church services. So, that means I have probably recited it at least 1800 times in my life. And it has a rhythm and beauty to it that lends itself to being easily memorized and recited by a congregation. So, if you have been at services here for any length of time, you probably know these words well: “I believe in God the Father, Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.” But what are we **declaring** with these words? What are we **arguing** in favour of and against with these words? And what are we **confessing** and **expressing thanks for** in terms of our faith?

Well, this is what we want to explore together today in the light of our text in Galatians 4. And we will have to step outside our text to see how other Bible passages fill out and explain some of the words and ideas in the text, but we want to celebrate the incredible privilege that is being adopted children of our Father in heaven. But to do that, we need to understand the significance and meaning of God as Father, and, more importantly, of God as *our* Father. And we will do this under three headings: God as the ***eternal* Father** of Jesus Christ, God as the ***Almighty* Father** of creation, and God as the ***faithful* Father** of believers.

1. So first of all, God as the ***Eternal* Father** of Jesus Christ. Verse 4 tells us that “*in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son*.”
	1. And as we consider these words together, the first hopefully obvious thing to note is that **two** **persons** are in view here – God and His Son. For it stands to reason that for God to send His Son, the Son must be a distinct person from God. And we know from this passage and other passages that address the same topic that the sending in view here is the sending of the Son by the Father from heaven to earth, to do the work of redemption. So, the Father and the Son are distinct persons. It was not the Father who was born of the virgin Mary or who died on the cross, it was the Son. And this means, for example, that we do not pray, Dear Father in heaven, thank you for dying on the cross for me, because it was the Son who died on the cross.
	2. But the next thing that we see is that these two persons are **Father** and Son. Some of us here have sons. And those of us who have sons are either mothers or fathers. But there is a word in verse 4 that makes it plain that God is the Father of this Son. It is the word “*His*.” That “*God sent forth His Son*” means that God is not the mother of this Son but the Father of this Son.
		1. And I am hoping that you are all thinking duh – isn’t that kind of obvious?! Of course, God is the Father and not the Mother of Jesus! But congregation, sadly, in our day and age, this needs to be said. And it needs to be said because there is a growing interest in the wider church today in the theology and worship of Mother God. We don’t have time today to explore this in detail, but it is, in large part, a result of feminism’s reaction to anything male as well as the plague of abuse that has infected the church. And so, because many men and fathers have inflicted pain on women and men and children, the idea that God is masculine has been rejected in favour of a feminine God. But congregation, this theology must be rejected. We can and must sympathize with women and men and children who have been victims of perversions of masculinity, but to link those perversions with the fatherhood of God or to turn God into our mother is to make an image of God of our own invention. And it is not our images, but Scripture that must shape our faith and practice. So, because of our text and the many other references in Scripture to God as He and Him and His and Father, to worship God is to worship God as Father.

* 1. And this brings us, next, to God as **eternal** Father. And this is where we have to step outside of this text to see that God is the *eternal* Father of the Son. Each father here this evening was not always a father. They *became* fathers when their first child was conceived. And so, when we see mention of the Father and the Son in the Bible, it is quite natural for us to assume that maybe there was some moment in history or eternity past when the Son came into existence; when God became Father.
		1. And so, throughout church history, there have been those who have suggested that this moment is when Jesus was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary. Surely, they say, that is when God became Father to the Son? But our text speaks of God sending the Son, not creating or making the Son. And as I said a moment ago, this was a sending from heaven to earth to be born of Mary. We see this described also in **Philippians 2**. So, Jesus existed in heaven as the second person of the Trinity and as the Son of God before He was sent to earth to be born of Mary.
		2. And in **John 1** we read of the Father and the Son being together in heaven “*in the beginning*.” And in **John 17**, Jesus spoke about the glory that He enjoyed with the Father *before* *the creation of the world*.
		3. And what all this means is that there was never a time that the Son did not exist as the Son; He is eternal. He is the eternally begotten Son of God. And because God says of Himself, in **Malachi 3:6**, “*For I the LORD* *do not change*,” it cannot be that He became the Father at some time, for then He would have changed. So, God is the *eternal* Father of His Son. He always *has* been, He *is now*, and He always *will be* the Father of His Son.
	2. So, do you have a headache yet? It’s a mystery, isn’t it. Anything to do with eternity is near on impossible for us to understand because we are so bound up in time. But brothers and sisters, **here is the payoff**! Our salvation is an overflow, if you like, of the Father’s eternal love for His Son. I am not quoting Scripture here, but because of what Scripture teaches, there would have been a conversation in heaven in eternity past that went something like this: The Father said, “Son, this love of ours is too wonderful to keep to ourselves. Let’s, with our eternal Spirit, make man in our own image, so that they might experience our love and unity and fellowship!” And what that means is that we, as believers, exist and are saved because of the Father’s *eternal* love for His Son! And this love is unchanging and unbreakable! And we have this as a sure and solid anchor for our faith! And that is worth remembering next time you are overcome with guilt because of your sins. Your salvation depends on the Father’s eternal love for His Son, not your progress in holiness! And we will spend eternity exploring and enjoying and experiencing the Father’s eternal love for His Son and for us!
1. Well, let’s turn our attention in the second place to God as the ***Almighty* Father** of Creation.
	1. Now, our text does not mention creation. But the God and Father of our text is the Almighty Father of creation. We see that throughout the Bible, and it is very important that we understand this and why it is significant. It is why we read from **Isaiah 40** earlier in the service. To an exiled and disheartened people, the Spirit of the Lord, through the prophet, said, “*Behold, your God*!” In other words, remember who your God is! Lift up your hearts, because of who God is! Be encouraged and hopeful because of who your God is! And then we have the glorious description of God the Creator:

He “*has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand and marked off the heavens with a span … He … sits above the circle of the earth. And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers … Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created [the stars]. He who brings out their host by number, calling them by name, by the greatness of His might, and because He is strong in power, not one is missing … The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth*.”

I was talking with Brother \_\_\_\_ the other day, who is an amateur astronomer. And he enjoys looking through his telescope at the night sky. And he was explaining about the distance between our galaxy and the nearest star, and the relative size of some stars to our sun, and the numbers and distances are just beyond comprehension.

* + 1. For example, the nearest star to our solar system, Proxima Centauri, is 43 trillion kms away! I was in Taupo last weekend, which is a journey of around 300kms, and I thought that was quite far away :-) If you could shrink the whole universe so that our Sun was just 1km wide, Proxima Centauri would then be (just) 30 million km’s away! 1 light year is 9 ½ trillion kms. That’s 9.5 with 11 zeros behind it. Well, the furthest galaxies seen in the universe are 15 billion light years away. So, multiply 9 ½ trillion by 15 billion and you get 145 with 21 zeros behind it kms!!!
		2. And the most amazing thing of all is that God created all this **out of nothing**, as our Lord’s Day says, simply be speaking it into existence! **Psalm 33:6&9**: “*By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of His mouth … For He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm*.”
			1. Boys and girls, do you like making things? I am sure you do. But when we make things, we have to start with raw materials. We cannot make something out of nothing. But God created the whole universe out of nothing in six days!
	1. And this has at least two implications that we do well to consider today:
		1. The first is that we must **reject the theory of naturalistic evolution**. The theory of naturalistic evolution is that everything has evolved over billions of years, following what is called the big bang. So, you eventually end up with an earth and then slime and then fish and then lizards and then apes and then humans. And an ultimate consequence and aim of that theory is to eliminate God in favour of natural processes. And there is plenty more we could say about all that but today we must keep it simple: In **Genesis 1**, God tells us how He created the universe. He tells us that He made all the fish species and bird species on the fifth day, and all the animal species on the sixth day, and then, finally, also on the sixth day, He created Adam from the dust of the ground, and Eve from the rib that He took out of Adam’s side, as the first human beings. And this Creator God is the God of the Bible. If the god you believe inis a god of naturalistic evolution, then you do not know the God who has revealed Himself in His word.
		2. But the second implication of God being the Almighty Father of creation is the incredible **comfort and encouragement** that this reality gives us as believers.
			1. Boys and girls, is your Dad really strong? Can he protect you and help you when you have injured yourself or you are upset or troubled? And you probably don’t have much money of your own, so you can just buy things, but Dad has lots of money, right, and he can buy things for you. And you can only kick or throw a ball so far, but Dad can throw it from one end of the park to the other! And when you are watching a quiz show, Dad seems to know all the answers! And it’s wonderfully comforting to have a dad who is all-powerful and mega-rich and all-knowing!
			2. Well, (and sorry to burst your bubbles, dads :-) ) but earthly fathers are not really all-powerful and mega-rich and all-knowing! But our Father in heaven is! And that is why, when Isaiah wanted to encourage the disheartened exiles, He pointed them to God as their Creator. And then he said, this God “*does not faint or grow weary; His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might He increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint*.” You see, a Creator God is *above* creation. He is powerful and sovereign. He rules. He raises up and overthrows. He directs and controls. He supervises and governs. He has a plan and purpose in all things.
			3. And this is why you can **know** for certain, according to **Romans 8:28**, “*that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose*.” It is why you can **confess**, as we did earlier in the service: “I trust Him so much that I do not doubt He will provide whatever I need for body and soul, and He will turn to my good whatever adversity He sends me in this sad world.”
1. And this is the comfort of knowing God as the Almighty Father of creation. But He is also, thirdly and lastly, the ***Faithful* Father** of Believers. Our text tells us that “*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. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God*.”
	1. I don’t know if you have heard of this before, but there is a theology that exists that is called **the Universal Fatherhood of God**. It is the idea that God is the father of everyone. And there are churches that promote this theology. And it kind of sounds nice – God loves everyone as their Father and will bring them all to heaven. But it simply is not what the Bible teaches. Yes, He is the Father of everyone in the general sense if Him having created everyone. But in terms of salvation, He is the Father only of those who believe in His Son for the forgiveness of their sins. And this is the clear and repeated message of Scripture. Here in our text, we see this reality in that the Father sent the Son to redeem or rescue or deliver or save those who were under the law. So, He is the Father only of the redeemed.
		1. In **Galatians 2**, Paul is clear that to be redeemed is to be justified through faith in Christ, which means to repent of your sins and believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And later in **chapter 5:19*ff***, there is a list of sins, and Paul says that those who refuse to believe in Jesus Christ and engage in these sins without repenting “*will not inherit the kingdom of God*.”
		2. And **John 3:16-18** makes the same distinction in declaring that eternal life is given only to those who believe in Jesus, and that “*whoever does not believe is condemned*.” So, in terms of salvation, God is the Father only of believers.
		3. So, I hope that you are one who has believed in and received Jesus as your Saviour and Lord.
	2. If you have, then our text explains in verse 5 that you are an **adopted son** of your Father in heaven, and in verse 6, that you are an **heir**.
		1. And having already made a comment about **the language of Scripture** in relation to God being our Father and not our Mother, notice here that all believers, be they male or female, are called “*sons of God*.” And this is what the Spirit of the Lord led Paul to write here. Because sexism is such a hot-button issue of our times, we read “*sons*” and we feel we must quickly and always add “and daughters,” lest the females in the room feel excluded. But congregation, this is not sexist language. This is not valuing maleness over femaleness. This is not meant in any way to exclude females. In **2 Corinthians 6:18**, Paul quotes from Isaiah where God says, “*I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me*.” So, God is not anti-female in any way. Whether we are male or female, we should be honoured to be, and to be called, “*sons of God*,” because that is what God intended with these words.
		2. The key point here is **the contrast between a son and a slave**. In Bible times, natural sons and even adopted sons had enormous privileges compared to slaves. For a slave to be adopted as a son was utterly and completely life-changing. There were new legal protections and benefits, and you were now served instead of having to serve others. You now stood to inherit your father’s estate when slaves never inherited anything.
			1. But try and put yourself in the shoes of a slave who has been adopted. What would be your number one question? Does my adoptive father really love me? Might he stop loving me? I know he loves his natural sons and daughters, because of their biological connection, but I am only adopted. Might I lose my benefits and protection and inheritance?
			2. And we can have the same question as adopted children of our Father in heaven – We know He loves and always will love Jesus, His natural Son, but we are only adopted. Does He *really* love us? Might He stop loving us? Could we lose our benefits and protections and inheritance?
			3. Well, our Father in heaven knows that we have this struggle. So, as we read in our text, “*God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"*” Do you see the point being made here? God sent His *Son* to *make* us His children, and then He sends us His *Spirit* to *assure* us that we really and truly are and always will be His children. And it is the special work of the Spirit to put the words Abba Father, or dearest or precious or faithful Father on our lips.
			4. One commentator offered the following beautiful illustration of this: He said,

*Often, when I hold my daughter on my lap, I lean over and whisper in her ear, "You will always be my special girl!" She usually responds to those words by snuggling closer and saying, "You're my special daddy!"*

*This is a picture of the relationship our Father God has with His children. First God sent His Son to save us from our sins and to make us all His sons and daughters. The Son is the elder brother who picks us up and sets us down on God's lap. Then God sent His Holy Spirit-the Divine Whisper who tells us that we will always be God's special children. When we hear the Spirit's whisper, our hearts cry out to God, "You will always be my Father."*

And so, as we draw to a close, at a personal level, the Lord Jesus said, “*Do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For … your heavenly Father knows that you need them all*.” And, “*which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!*”

And in terms of relationship problems, financial hardships, struggles in the church, anti-Christian ideas and philosophies becoming more and more popular, war in Ukraine and elsewhere, know that all these work together for the good of God’s children. Why? Because the eternal Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Almighty Father of Creation, and the faithful Father of believers ***causes*** them to work together for your good. And though it may seem very difficult to see how this is so, in the moment, that is the promise of your faithful Father in heaven. Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Amen.