

ADOPTION

Room for One More?



JAYMIE STUART WOLFE

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Jaymie Stuart Wolfe



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*For all who dare to set sail
on love's uncharted oceans,
and to the Holy Spirit
who guides them.*



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Introduction

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs . . . of God and joint heirs with Christ. . . .

— ROMANS 8:14–17

In the Spring of 2002, my husband, Andrew, and I boarded a plane to Moscow and then an overnight train to the city of Voronezh in southern Russia. Two days later, a Russian judge declared that a child we had met only three weeks before was our daughter. We didn’t know much of her language. We knew even less about her past. We believed, however, that the God who made each of us belong to him, could also teach us how to belong to one another.

This is my story, not our daughter's. Perhaps someday she will tell her own.

"Our Father, who art in heaven . . ." The words slip so easily past our lips, with so little hesitation, that there is not nearly enough time to consider what it is we are actually saying. On a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee, Jesus answered his eager disciples when they asked him how to pray. He taught them to begin by claiming God—the Eternal, Almighty Creator of all—as their father.

In that moment, Jesus gave us his Father as our own and initiated in us an entirely new life—even a new identity. But because only Jesus himself was begotten not made, because only he was *born* the Son of God, the rest of us must come to understand our identity as God's children in a different way. It is true that God creates every human being in his image, and, in that sense, we are all his children. But through Baptism, God brings us into a special relationship with him. The power of sacramental grace gives us a share in his divine life as the *adopted* children of the Father. We might as well pray, "Our (*adoptive*) Father."

Saint Paul tells us that the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, is the power behind our identity as children of God and coheirs with Christ. We are chosen, saved, loved, incorporated—even sealed (a legal term)—by the Holy Spirit, who then witnesses to us the truth of who we have become. That Spirit enables us to cry out to God, "*Abba*," or "Daddy." It is not a spirit of slavery or fear, but the *Spirit of adoption*.

The Holy Family shows us the depth of this mystery. We celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus at Christmas. We tend to overlook, however, that the Holy Family is both "biological" and "adoptive." Mary gave birth to Jesus, and Joseph adopted him. Taking Mary into his house, Joseph raised Jesus "as his own." But more, in doing so, Joseph gave himself fully to Jesus. Joseph's life reflects the divine

fatherhood of God. He is not just a caregiver, but a father to the Word-made-flesh. His relationship to the child Jesus is not merely functional. It involves his identity, the core of who he is. Later on, the people of Nazareth would ask, “Isn’t this the son of Joseph?” The answer may not be simple, but it cannot be a flat, “No.”

The Church is also an adoptive “holy family.” Each of us approaches the baptismal font as a creature and leaves it as a son or daughter of the Most High. We are adopted into the family of the Church. In Christ, people of every race and culture and age, otherwise unrelated to each other, are made brothers and sisters in one eternal household. The love of Christ challenges us to love one another well, to accept one another as part of the same family, to forgive and heal and care for each other, and to bear one another’s burdens.

All this is to say that our Christian faith gives us, from its very beginnings, a rich source for reflecting on what adoption is and what it means. It is from our self-understanding as adopted children of God that we can begin to see what kind of love leads us to adopt a child ourselves, and what kind of love sustains us in being adoptive parents.

This book is written to encourage those who, like our family, are finding themselves walking a rather dimly lit road paved with many choices and few guideposts. Its purpose is to help families and their friends approach adoption from the perspective and calling of the Catholic faith. I have no intention of pushing adoption as an agenda. For, while almost all adoptive families consider themselves blessed, adopting a child is not right or appropriate for every family. I have, however, experienced the distinct call that adoption had—and continues to have—in our family life.

Because adoption doesn’t just fall out of the sky, because every action that is taken flows from extended reflection and discernment,

I have begun each chapter with a spiritual reflection. This is followed by a personal anecdote drawn from our experience and the experiences of other families I have met, practical considerations, think-it-through-questions for those considering adoption and those who want to support them, and a brief prayer. It is my hope that any who are called to travel this path will experience the deeply spiritual nature of what they are doing and find in *Adoption: Room for One More?* a way to connect more deeply to the God whose love reaches far beyond himself to each one of us. This is the God we are privileged to call “Father.”

Why Adopt?



CHAPTER 1



Called to Be Family

Choosing Love

So (Naomi) said, “See your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.

— RUTH 1:15–16

REFLECTION

Ruth had a choice to make. Her husband was dead. Her sister-in-law, also widowed, had decided to go back to her original people and ways. And Naomi, her mother-in-law, was on the move as well. Free from any formal obligation, Ruth could choose any path without fear of judgment. There was no “wrong” choice. She was no

longer bound to a husband or his family, nor was she tied to the world she had left when she married into another people. If she went back to Moab no one would blame her. Knowing what to expect—and what would be expected of her—Ruth could take her place among familiar surroundings, perhaps a little wiser for what she had experienced among foreigners.

But that is not what Ruth did. Instead of reaching back to erase what had happened to her, she chose to push ahead. Love would not let her return. The same love that had called her to marry outside her own people, now called her forward to accompany the mother-in-law who had embraced her. Love is always a choice—and always one that involves both a leaving behind and a going forth. Ruth chose not only to go with Naomi, but also to leave her own home, her own people, even her own gods behind. She could not have been sure of what the future would hold. Nonetheless, Ruth chose to make all that was Naomi's her own.

PERSONAL

The idea of adopting a child came to my husband and me gradually. Like land first appearing on the horizon, what we saw grew larger with every passing day, but it was impossible to see much detail. Far from shore, idealism was a ready companion. The realities of the process and the changes that adopting a child would bring to our lives were sketchy at best. With seven children, it was tempting to take a been-there-done-that attitude. (Kids are kids, right?) Still, we sensed that raising an adopted child might very well present us with a whole new set of challenges.

Looking back, we did not know what adopting a child would take, nor did we fully appreciate all that it would demand of us. One thing, however, was and still is very clear: adoption came to us as a

distinct—and then sudden—call. One day we were just minding our own business. The next, we were inundated with adoption stories and information. Everything—even the readings at Mass—seemed to relate to adoption. When complete strangers started offering personal anecdotes, I began wondering if someone had stuck a sign on my back saying, “Talk to Me about Adoption.”

As the seriousness of our considerations increased, the call to adopt became louder, clearer, and less avoidable. It was as if a path was being cleared before us. God, the divine Bushwhacker, was on the move. We just had to figure out how to follow—and keep up.

PRACTICAL

At the root, love is always and essentially *optional*. In many ways, the dynamic of adoption is a lot like that of marriage. When we choose to marry, we decide to love for life. We fully accept one another’s strengths and weaknesses, choose to forgive, and commit to growth that brings us closer. A couple doesn’t start off as one, but becomes one by becoming one another’s. Marriage is a call, a vocation to self-giving love. It is not for everyone. The same things can be said of adoption.

Not infrequently, the spark of adoption originates with one spouse and then spreads to the other. In that case it is important to slow things down enough to allow *both* prospective parents time and space for discernment. You may be convinced beyond a doubt that God is calling you to adopt a child. There is no need to rush. The love required to build a strong family can be undermined if one spouse manipulates—or capitulates to—the other. The decision to adopt a child must be made in unity and in peace.

Many seem to consider adoption a generous or courageous choice. I do not. Recently I’ve been inspired by friends who

discerned that adding an adoptive child to their family was not what God wanted. Their hearts were open; so were their ears. But as their children's needs changed and their own responsibilities evolved, things became clear. For them, the decision *not* to adopt was a choice to love that was made with both generosity and courage.

Adoption is the deliberate choice to extend the natural boundaries of family life. Stretching to make any family inclusive takes work. In our home, it did not happen all at once, but continues one step at a time. Those steps are daily choices that sometimes don't feel much like choices at all.

For reasons beyond our understanding, God chooses to be a Father to us. There is nothing that forces the Lord to do so. We are not the Master's only creatures, but God has not made himself a Father to stars or trees, butterflies or horses. We know this because the Son of God, Jesus Christ, became one of *us*. Every family is called to be what the household of heaven is: a haven of life and love. What we leave behind or press forward to in answering that call to adopt will never be a cookie-cutter or one-size-fits-all proposition. It will be as intensely personal as love itself.

Think it through

- ❖ How would adoption be choosing love for you and your family right now?
- ❖ How are you experiencing the idea of adopting a child as a calling from God?
- ❖ Are you ready to say "yes" to adoption? Are you free to be able to say "no"?
- ❖ Will you commit to praying daily for your friend or family member who is considering adoption?

Pray it through

HOLY SPIRIT, SPIRIT OF UNITY, help us to hear the call that draws us together. Empower us to choose love. Teach us how to belong to one another. Guide our considerations and our choices. Inspire us to look forward and beyond the boundaries of ourselves. Help us not only to know what you are asking of us, but also to follow it to completion. Keep our feet on the way of love and our hearts at the center of your will. Be with us, Holy Spirit, and with all the members of our family, those we know and love and those whom we have yet to meet. Amen.