

Embryo Adoption: A Christian Option

By Gabriel Fluhrer



One of the most encouraging developments of late is the surging interest in adoption among Christians. From the “Together for Adoption” conferences to a growing number of publications on the subject, increased attention is being given to this important matter.

Also demanding more attention from Christians are the questions of bioethics. The rapid advances in medical technology have caught the church somewhat off-guard. Biblically informed answers are needed for these questions.

What do adoption and medical technology have in common? When it comes to embryo adoption, much in every way. In this article, I want to offer both personal testimony to the wonder of embryo adoption and, more importantly, a defense of its scriptural feasibility.

Shortly after the birth of our first child, my wife and I learned we would no longer be able to have children. As you might imagine, it was crushing news. But, since our conversion, both of us had been committed to adopting children. The adoption door was just being opened sooner than we had planned.

We knew very little about adoption, but we learned a lot quickly. Perhaps the most fascinating thing we learned was that we were candidates for the relatively new field of embryo adoption. The situation is fairly easily explained. Since the growth of in vitro fertilization (IVF), there are literally hundreds of thousands of embryos left over from such procedures. Many of these are simply discarded.

This is where the agency we worked with, Snowflakes, enters the picture. It facilitates the adoption of embryos that have resulted from IVF. I would encourage you to visit their website (<http://www.nightlight.org/snowflake-embryo-adoption>) to see how embryo adoption works. We connected with Snowflakes and began the journey of adopting our embryos.

Since current state laws (rightly, in my judgment) allow for only two embryos at a time to be transferred to a woman, one of the (many) things that made Snowflakes attractive was their commitment to the preservation of embryos that were adopted but not transferred. For example, the remaining embryos that we adopted legally belong to my wife and me. The adoptive couple, working with Snowflakes, can choose to attempt another embryo transfer, store the embryos, or put them up for adoption.

And so it was, in December 2010, that our precious daughter was born, one year to the day after we adopted her as an embryo. While she is not our biological child, she is

ours by adoption. She is one of the Lord's rejoiced-over covenant children!

The whole world of embryo adoption is strange to many (it certainly was to us!) and presents a host of complex questions. However, since the Bible clearly teaches that life begins at conception (Ps. 139:13–14), embryo adoption seems to me to be an outstanding opportunity to put our theology of life into practice. Since the pool of candidates for embryo adoption is relatively small, it may seem to be a minor issue. Are there not children already born, orphaned or needing a home, who deserve our attention more than frozen embryos?

But that implicit choice presents a false dichotomy. As believers, we ought to use all our available resources to serve children who need adoptive families, whether born or unborn. Since we believe that life begins at conception, we have a duty before the Lord to care for the little children, wherever they are found.

After all, the Lord declares that he himself is the primary advocate of widows and orphans (cf. Ex. 22:22–24; Ps. 10:14, 18; 68:5; Isa. 1:17; Jer. 49:11; James 1:27). Thus, the biblical testimony is clear on two matters related to embryo adoption. First, life begins at conception. From that moment, nothing less than an image bearer of the living God is being formed. Second, it follows that embryos, being image bearers of God, are not to be discarded as so much unused property. Embryo adoption, informed by a biblical doctrine of life, challenges the pragmatism of many modern medical decisions.

Let me therefore urge two things. First, embryo adoption reminds believers of their duty to consider adoption in every form. It will do us little good to complain when homosexual couples are allowed to adopt children when we ourselves refuse to adopt those same children. The failure to adopt is a blight upon the church and a shame upon our heads as Christians.

Ancient pagan Romans were both fascinated and repulsed by the willingness of Christians to rescue their unwanted children, many of whom had been abandoned to die by exposure. And while the “baby wheels” of ancient Rome do not scar our metaphorical city gates, the sheer number of children who are up for adoption in a given city bears eloquent, if not damning, testimony to the modern church's failure to imitate the cloud of witnesses that has gone before us.

Let me speak a word to younger Christian couples here. I do not say this to shame you, but to encourage you. I have seen young couples (yes, even in Reformed churches) that wait extended periods of time to have children. The reasons they give are largely financial. Moreover, I have rarely heard such couples consider adoption. After all, if they feel unsure about having their own biological child, it is not surprising that they would be unwilling to adopt someone else's.

We need to challenge this mind-set. Our marriages ought to be a picture of Christ's love for his church—and God's love for the fatherless. Orphans ought to be welcomed into our churches and our homes. We not only should ask the Lord to bless us with “our own” little ones, but also ought to pray that God would give us the privilege of caring for those whom the world discards.

Second, and more particularly, let me encourage couples that are considering IVF to consider embryo adoption instead. Yes, there are complex and perhaps troubling questions that arise when a couple undertakes embryo adoption—this no one denies. But the clear command to care for God's image bearers ought to be uncontroversial. Embryo adoption presents an opportunity to care for those who, for whatever reason (some good

and some bad), are simply being stored until they are discarded. Should not Christians who have been providentially placed in the situation of considering IVF also consider caring for orphaned embryos? Let us weigh our actions carefully.

I have not aimed at a self-righteous tone in this article. My own selfish thinking regarding adoption shames me. Rather, I have sought to encourage believers to consider adoption in general and embryo adoption, if possible, in particular. If you are providentially hindered from adopting, there is much you can do. Get involved with the local adoption agency. Reformed believers manage many of these agencies—an extra blessing! So pray. Give money. Support couples who are seeking to adopt.

Finally, let us all remember that we are adopted children by the amazing grace of God. I am always struck by the words of J. I. Packer: “If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his father.” Orphaned by the world, we have been rescued by the Father, in the Son, through the Spirit. And now the Spirit of adoption cries “Abba! Father!” in us. So important was the doctrine of adoption to our forefathers, that they included a separate chapter in the Confession on the subject. All Christians, as adopted, beloved children of the living God, ought to be fundamentally oriented toward adoption.

The author is pastor of Shiloh Presbyterian Church in Cary, N.C. This article first appeared in New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, March 2013. It is used with permission.