

HIS

Nature

I kneel before the Father, from whom
his whole family in heaven and
on earth derives its name.

EPHESIANS 3:14-15

FAITHFUL FATHER

Even a brief exploration of Christ's handiwork will reveal the compassionate character of his Father (2 Corinthians 1:3; James 5:11). Examine with me our heavenly Father's loving kindness as demonstrated in the emperor penguin (*Aptenodytes forsteri*), and we will gain a deeper appreciation of how much God cares for us!

It is well known among bird lovers (or ornithologists) that birds generally make very good parents. Canada geese, for instance, often allow their young goslings to ride on their backs when in the water. This not only keeps the youngsters cozy and warm, but it also protects them from the gaping jaws of large fish (e.g., northern pike and muskie). Of all birds, however, male emperor penguins may provide the greatest reflection of our eternal Father's undying dedication.

In March and April—the beginning of Antarctic winter—emperor penguins



Emperor Penguin
Family

come ashore to have young. (That these birds breed in winter is a very unusual habit for any of Christ's creatures!) The parents waddle as many as 50 miles on polar ice to reach their traditional breeding sites. Once there, Mom lays a single egg, keeping it with her for only the first hour; then she passes it along to Dad. The father penguin carefully balances the prized egg on his webbed feet, covering it with his feathered and somewhat plump belly. The male emperor penguin spends the next *two months* patiently protecting

continued...

and incubating the egg, while Mom goes back to sea in search of food.

Throughout June—the dead of winter in Antarctica—the male penguin endures long, lonely, black nights and frequent blizzards. He huddles in the darkness with other fathers to keep from freezing, enduring temperatures that plunge to minus 75 degrees Fahrenheit (-60° C) and winds that tear at 100 miles per hour (160 kph)!

Yet each father gently presses the priceless egg against his body with unwavering dedication, never leaving it alone, even for a moment. Despite brutal conditions, the faithful father's embrace ensures that his unborn chick remains a snug 95 degrees Fahrenheit (35° C) around the clock.

After many weeks' absence, the female penguin finally returns from the sea. With her invisible Creator as her guide, she locates her mate from among the thousands of penguins at the rookery site, often coming home the same day her egg hatches. What timing! Upon reunion, the egg (or chick) is gently passed from the exhausted father to its mother. By this time, Dad has lost up to half of his body weight, having gone more than four months without food—

now it's his turn to eat. He sets out for the ocean and spends a month dining on seafood, again fattening his tummy. The male penguin then dutifully returns home to help Mom.

During the first 40 to 50 days after hatching, one of the two parents is always with their chick. Mom and Dad take turns feeding the ravenous fledgling regurgitated fish. When the young bird is old enough, it follows the adults into the sea, where it spends the next five to eight years learning the penguin way of life.

Do you see the hand of our tender God revealed in the emperor penguin? How much more does he care for those made in his image! (1 Peter 5:7).

Digging Deeper

The yearly gathering of penguin fathers is a precious picture of Christ's church and the benefits of long-suffering. Brooding penguins unselfishly rotate their position in the group so that those exposed to the bitter cold on the outside can also enjoy the warmth of the inner circle.

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Our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:7