

Galatians 4:4-7 – Sunday after Christmas - 12/29/13

“But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father’. So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.”

In the name of the Infant who came to be our Savior, dear Friends,

When God created this world He regulated time in seconds, minutes, hours and days. Our days are **measured** and **consistent**. Why is it, then, that some days seem to drag, while other speed by? My guess is that when we **look forward** to something with anxious anticipation, it never seems to get here, or at least, it seems to take a long time to arrive. On the other hand, when we are in **no particular rush**, time seems to fly by. Add to that it almost seems to be proportionate by age – the younger you are the slower things seem to come, especially events like Christmas, birthdays, vacations. Whereas, the older you are the more quickly time seems to pass.

Maybe your Christmas celebration had some of those elements this year - too slow in coming or too fast in arriving. No matter how you felt, the days leading up to Christmas were **measured** and **consistent** – each day had God’s allotted 24 hours. When everything was right and ready, December 25th arrived.

Do you notice there is a **parallel idea** found in our text for today? It says, “*When the time had fully come*” or, as we often say, “*In the fullness of time*”. Something was coming, something was being **anticipated** – **the Messiah, the Christ**. After the **fall** into sin and the **promise** of the Savior had been made, Adam and Eve were the first to anticipate the “*fullness of time*”. Each succeeding generation of God-fearing people continued to look forward to when the time would “*fully come*”. The **prophets** repeated the promise. The **patriarchs**, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob received the promise and looked forward to its fulfillment. **Believers** through succeeding generations did the same.

If it had been up to us, it wouldn’t have taken so long. But that only shows our ignorance and God’s wisdom. Our Heavenly Father waited some 4,000 years for the “*fullness of time*” before revealing His gift of love. As God allowed 120 years for the call to repentance to go out before sending the Flood, so He permitted 400 years to elapse after the final Old Testament prophecy of Malachi before sending the Messiah. Things needed to be made ready.

He had **Alexander the Great** conquer the world and thus unite the world with the Greek language. He had the **Romans** organize the world under one rule and build an extensive highway system that allowed comparative ease of travel around the Mediterranean world. He had **Caesar Augustus** make a decree that all Roman subjects should register for taxation purposes, bringing Mary and Joseph to David’s city of Bethlehem. Everything had to be **in order** before the time would be **full**.

In spite of all the preparations that God made, the **world**, for the most part was **not ready** to meet and greet the Savior. Because of unbelief their eyes were blinded to this glorious event. Even the nation of Israel, God’s chosen people, had fallen to spiritual lows. That’s why we know that the “*fullness of time*” did not come because mankind deserved it. Rather, it came about by the will of our loving God who saw the desperate need for a Deliverer to **satisfy** the stern demands of His Law, and to **pay** the debt of this world’s sin.

So, **in spite of** man's condition, **rather because of it**, "*when the time had fully come, God sent His Son!*" That's why we are so happy about today and everyday. That's why we can join to say, I'M SO GLAD THE "FULLNESS OF TIME" CAME. I'm glad because this assures me that: God **sent** His Son to redeem me; that my **adoption** has been completed, and that I'm **ready** for the second "fullness of time".

The announcement by the angel, "*For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord*" (Luke 2:11), filled the hearts of the **shepherds** with great joy. The hearts of **many** who had waited for the coming of the Messiah, were filled in the same way. But there were many others who were **unaffected** by the miracle in Bethlehem's manger. They didn't know **who** this "*baby, wrapped in stripes of cloth and lying in a manger*" (Luke 2:12) was. They didn't know He **had arrived** at precisely the right, God-appointed time. They didn't know **why** He had come. To many He looked just like every other child born into the world, and it certainly was true that He was and is **true man**. But He is **much more** than that! He was also **true God**.

In our day, when the deity of Christ is often **maligned**, when even some religious leaders **deny** the divinity and almighty power of Jesus, it is reassuring to know that this Child is **true God** --- That He, who stated, "*I am the Way...Truth...Life, no one comes to the Father, but by Me*" (John 14:6) has the divine power to **rise above** death and to **crush** the head of Satan. He is not merely a "good teacher", or only the "best person" to ever live. He is, as we confess in the Nicene Creed, "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through Him all things were made..." He has power over **everything** because of **who He is**. The Apostle Peter put it so well, "*You (Jesus) are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*" (Matthew 16:16)

Yet what do **we** see? **We** see a Child, "*born of a woman*", born of the virgin Mary, and how very important it is for us to see that! He was born in this way so that He might be **subject** to God's Law and **keep it** perfectly for us. As **our "brother"** He, "*was in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin.*" (Hebrews 4:15) As our brother **He died** in our place on Calvary's Cross to redeem us from the curse of God's law.

When God created our first parents, He gave them a **perfect knowledge** of His Will, which was a **sure guide** for sinless living. That perfect knowledge was **lost** through the Fall. Yet God **still demands** perfection from all of us. It would be very easy to point out how others have ignored, despised, and broken God's Laws. But the trouble is, counting up the sins of others doesn't do anything to lessen our guilt. All the **selfish** thoughts, the **unclean** desires, **unholy** greed, **unjust** anger, jealous thoughts that flow out of our sinful hearts are enough to make us ask: How could we ever be so foolish as to think that we can earn God's favor by "being good", by trying to fulfill God's Law?

That's why **we are so glad** the "*fullness of time*" came – that God sent His Son to **take our place** and thus to **redeem us** from the curse and condemnation that we deserve. Where we fail, Jesus stepped in and **met** every demand of the Law, perfectly, to the complete satisfaction of our just God. As far as God is concerned, **we** have kept the Law in **Christ's keeping** of the law. And now, **freed** from the curse of the Law, we can have the joy of Christmas every day of the year.

Aren't you glad the "*fullness of time*" came? I am! I know God sent His Son to **redeem** me and assures me that my **adoption** as a child of God has been **completed**.

One of the points made in the parable of the Prodigal Son is that the younger son did not **realize** or **appreciate** all the blessings that were his as a son of his father. (Luke 15:11-24) Can't you just hear him saying, as he enviously watched the pigs eating while he went hungry, "I never had it so good as when I was home with my father and family. If only I had never left!" Do you ever lose sight of the **elevated position** you enjoy as God's child? This can happen when tantalizing temptations flood into our hearts and minds, making those temptations seem so appealing. Then nothing seems more important than reveling in the sinful pleasure Satan is dangling before us. Then even our position as God's child can appear to be something easily forgotten.

It's vital then, that we continually **focus on** the blessings that are ours as children of God. We are God's children **by adoption**, an adoption made possible only because of the terrific price Jesus paid for us. As an adopted child of God there are many blessings to be enjoyed. There is the **safety and protection** against the winds of adversity and the storms of temptation. There is the precious Bread of Life – God's Word – that nourishes our soul. There is **God's love unbounded**. The God who, in love for you, gave His only-begotten Son into death for you, will **never leave** you or **forsake you**.

And think of the privilege you have to **bring all your needs before Him**, confident that He will help you because He loves you, as His own. As Hebrew children would use the term of endearment, "*Abba*" when speaking to the Lord, so we can call Him our dear Father. Jesus taught us to do just that, to pray, "*Our Father*", because we are His children. As such, "*we may with all boldness and confidence ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.*" (Luther's Address to Lord's Prayer)

Finally, the crowning point of our relationship with God our Father is that, as His beloved children, we are "**in line**" for an **eternal inheritance**. That glorious inheritance is an "*inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, (that will) not fade away, (but is) reserved in heaven for you...*" (I Peter 1:4) That inheritance includes **freedom** from pain and distress, relief from grief and suffering, no death or eternal punishment in hell. It offers instead, **peace and joy**, eternal **happiness** and **bliss**, and most glorious of all, **dwelling forever** in the presence of our divine Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

Aren't you glad the "*fullness of time*" came? I sure am! It assures me that God **sent** His Son to **redeem** me and that, my **adoption** has been **completed**. Because of this **I'm ready** for the second "*fullness of time*", that is, the time when our **Savior will come** in all His glory to judge all mankind. Until that time, our Lord, who "*wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*", (I Timothy 2:4) wants us to **use the time** He gives us to proclaim the Good News to all the world.

We don't know when that "*fullness of time* - the end of time - will come. But we do know that it is getting closer every day. So it's time to work, while the clock is still ticking. Tell of the first "*fullness of time*" when God "*Sent His Son, born of a woman, born under Law, to redeem those under Law, that we might receive the full rights of son,*" so that more and more will be spiritually ready for the second "*fullness of time*" when Christ comes in all His glory.

Pastor Mark L. Hallemeyer