

At the Right Time – Galatians 4:4-7

Main Idea: The birth of Christ is the meeting place of past and future, and every detail of His birth bears the purpose of saving sinners.

I. The Plan | Galatians 4:4

As the season of Advent begins, we prepare our hearts to reflect on **the foundational truth of Christianity—God Himself stepped into the frailty of human existence to save sinners.** Through this act, Christ bridges the infinite gap between Creator and creation, bringing light into the darkness, life into death, and hope into a world desperate for redemption. **The term and season of Advent date back to the fifth century when the Western Church began to incorporate the four Sundays preceding Christmas Day as an expectation of the final coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.** Following the theme “The Word Became Flesh,” our Advent Series this year begins in Galatians—an epistle that the Apostle Paul writes to a group of churches in Asia Minor contrasting what the Law does with what Christ has done. Throughout the epistle, Paul confronts the dangers of legalism infiltrating the early church, particularly the false teaching that adherence to the ceremonial law given to Moses is necessary for salvation (Gal. 1:6-9), reminding believers that justification is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, apart from works of the Law (Gal. 2:15-21). Through its theological depth and personal tone, Galatians defends Christian freedom and underscores the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, applying their adoption as children of God calling to live as heirs of His promise (Gal. 3:1-14). As we enter chapter 4, we are exposed to the when, how, and why of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. **Until the birth of Christ, all men lived under the unachievable standards and perfect judgment of the Law. Now that the Word has become flesh, having lived in perfect obedience to the Law, dying as a perfect sacrifice and raising from the dead, those who are in Him are no longer slaves to the bonds of the Law but children of God.**

The Law given to Moses (Exodus 20) is perfect from the perspective of the lawmaker—describing the holiness of God and His standards. From the perspective of the sinner, however, it is the most brutal and cruel taskmaster, since no matter how hard sinners endeavor to do good works and obey it, they can never do enough to achieve salvation from God (Gal. 2:16; James 2:10; Rom. 3:23). **From God’s judicial standpoint, the Law given to Moses becomes essentially the executioner of all sin—condemning it in the flesh.** In other words, **those who violate God’s Law write their own death sentence.** In light of the clear reality of man’s helplessness in his sin, Paul begins to explain when and how the Incarnation of Christ happened, “But when the fulness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the Law” (v.4). Biblically, “the fullness of time” is God’s way of saying: “At the perfect, exact, and precise time.” Like everything else that happens, **God had set forth a specific time, before the foundation of the world, for Christ to take on human flesh.** The birth of Christ was not an accident, not a “plan B”, nor an occasional event but a miraculous intervention that changed the course of human history. Christ came when the world was ready for his coming, too. The Greeks had provided a common language and culture for sharing the gospel. Through the might of the Romans, there was safe transport for spreading the gospel. But most of all, sinners were ready to be released from their bondage. The Gentiles were tired of serving the old pagan gods. The Jews were weary of being held prisoner by the law they had tried (and failed) to keep for over a thousand years. So, it was at just the right time—not a moment too soon, not a moment too late—that Christ came to make us God’s sons and daughters.

The fact that “God sent forth His Son” (v.4b) confirms Christ’s eternally existing reality. His sending from heaven thus declares his divine nature—co-equal to the Father and with the Spirit in glory and might. When the time had fully come, the eternally divine Son of God took on human flesh being “born of woman” (v.4c). **Whereas the word “sent” implies his eternal deity, the word “born” declares his true humanity.** In Genesis 1, God created the world by His Word. In Genesis 2, after creating man and woman, God and man enjoyed fellowship between Creator and creature. In Genesis 3, upon the disobedience of both man and woman of God falling to the deceit of Satan, sin came into the world, and with sin, not only death but those who once served God and His creation became servants of Satan in a fallen world. In Genesis 3:15, however, a promise was made by God that from a woman would come a seed that would crush the head of the serpent, and all that the serpent would be able to do is to bruise his heel (Genesis 3:15) restoring then the once broken relationship between Creator and creature. By being “born under the law” (v.4d), Christ also placed Himself under its demands. **Like all men, Christ bore the responsibility to obey the law; like no man, He obeyed the law perfectly.**

To Ponder:

1. How does Paul’s description of the Incarnation of Christ shape your understanding of the “Christmas season?”

II. The Purpose | Galatians 4:5

Although Christ was indeed born of a woman, the purpose of His birth can be compared to that of no other man. Whereas in verse 4 the plan behind Christ's birth is explained, in verse 5 the purpose for His birth becomes evident, "To redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (v.5). It is because Christ was not spared from the demands of the Law, yet He obeyed it, that through Him repentant sinners can receive adoption as sons (Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:5). **Every detail of Christ's birth bears the ultimate purpose of saving sinners!** Jesus' birth confirms the reality that He came to die—not for the sake of dying but for the sake of saving sinners. **Every person saved by Christ becomes a child of God through adoption.** An adopted child receives a new legal name, family relationship, inheritance, privileges, and expectations. Therefore, to those who have been adopted in Christ, a new birth takes place, and a new life begins (Rom. 8:9; 11).

John Wesley, a prominent leader of a revival movement within the Church of England, before being reached by the grace of God, considered himself to be a better Christian than most believers, at least as far as his outward behavior was concerned. During his days at Oxford, he helped establish a group called "the Holy Club." The students in the club went to church, studied their Bibles, fasted, and prayed. They went into the prisons and workhouses to do evangelism. They provided food, clothing, and education for the poor children of the city. Yet, all the while they were spiritual orphans, in bondage to their own religiosity. It was not until years later that Wesley was finally convicted of his sin through the work of the Holy Spirit and drawn to Christ in repentance and faith. As he looked back on everything he had done for God before he came to Christ, he wrote, "I had even then the faith of a servant, though not that of a son."¹ **The adoption found in Christ surpasses anything that takes place on earth (Eph. 3:14-15).** It bestows upon its recipients a new image, the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). Earthly parents may love an adopted child as their own, but they cannot impart their spirit to that child. When God adopts, however, He imparts the Spirit of Christ to each of His children (Rom. 8:9).

To Ponder:

1. What rights and privileges come with being adopted by God?
2. What responsibilities are given to believers as children of God?

III. The Privilege | Galatians 4:6-7

There is no greater privilege than to be a child of God indwelt by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:15). The Spirit applies the adoption that the Son accomplishes in obedience to the Father. The work of the Son is to bring us into a relationship with the Father, while the work of the Spirit is to seal that family tie. In verse 6, all three persons of God the Trinity are indicated as the harmonious unity of the One True God is set forth, "And because we are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (v.6). When we cry out to God, we use the very word Jesus used when he called to his Father in the hours before his death: "Abba, Father" (Mark 14:36). "Abba" is a term of respect as well as endearment. It means "Dear Dad," or "Dearest Father." Galatians was written during a time when most Gentiles had the mentality that in order to be a part of the family of God, one needed to become a Jew. Remarkably, the Apostle Paul is saying this to the Galatians— "You, Galatians, weak, foolish, once alienated Gentiles need to know that you are no longer considered as outcasts of God's promise, but you are now sons of God." When God chose the Hebrews while they were still in captivity in Egypt, He rescued them from slavery. As He rescued them, He did so by referring to Israel as "my firstborn son" (Exodus 4:22-23). **Because of the complete work of Christ, Gentile believers are not simply adjuncts to Abraham's family but full members of the Israel of God,** "And if you are in Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29). The privilege of eternal life with God in heaven is for everyone who becomes a child of God by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 6:16). **The birth of Christ marks the beginning of a new identity,** and because that happen according to Galatians 3:26—all who believe are sons of God. Fellowship with the Creator is regained. **The birth of Christ is the meeting place of past and future, and every detail of His birth bears the purpose of saving sinners.**

To Ponder:

1. In what ways do you see believers (including yourself) getting distracted from the central truth of Christ's birth during this season?
2. How can you share the truth about the Incarnation of Christ during this Christmas season?

¹ Thomas Jackson *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 1, (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 93.