

The Fulness of Time  
Galatians 4:4-5  
Christmas Day 2015

*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*

At Christmas time, it's hard to find any place where you are protected from advertisements. Your television is bombarded with them. Billboards are plastered with smiling faces to make you think that if you buy their product you will be as happy as these pictures; The radio, the internet, every department store that sells anything and everything. Everywhere you turn something is shouting at you, "Buy me!" "Take me home!"

Preaching a Christmas sermon is much like Christmas advertising. You have shepherds shouting, "Preach me!" You have wise men calling to you, "Hey, preach us!" You have Old Testaments prophets and Old Testaments prophecies crying "Preach about us." You even have sweet sounding angels singing, "Preach about our message."

Today, I have turned a deaf ear to all of these. Today, I want us to spend some of our Christmas time with the Apostle Paul. We are going to take a close look at what Paul told the Galatian Christians about the coming of Jesus. To do this, we must look past the commercialism that has come to surround Christmas. We also have to look beyond all the standard Christmas themes. Today, we want to center on what the birth of Jesus provides for us, 2000 years later.

Our first consideration is the fact that God is always on time. Verse 4 of our reading says: *when the fullness of time had come*. That simply means, at exactly the right time.

Let's see how many of us have had an experience like this. You have an appointment at the doctor's office for 2pm. As you get ready at home, you keep one eye on the clock so you're sure not to be late. You make it to the doctor's office 10 minutes early.

At 2pm, the nurse comes into the waiting room and calls someone back to the examination room, but it's not you. Another person is called back at 2:15pm. A third person goes back at 2:30pm, and a fourth at 2:45pm. You're still sitting and waiting. Your patience is wearing thin. You're getting upset and frustrated. Then you notice a sign on the wall that says you will be charged if you miss an appointment. It's frustrating when you are on time and someone else isn't.

The good news of today's text is that God is always on time. God is never late for an appointment. God never misses an appointment. Of course, God isn't governed by our concept of time. God's appointments are his promises, and God's record of keeping his promises on time is perfect.

Consider Joseph – not Mary's Joseph, but Jacob's Joseph. Joseph traveled a rough road. His brothers sold him as a slave. He was hauled off to a foreign land. He was

bought on the open slave market. Just when things starting looking up, his master's wife takes a shine to him, he rejects her, and he lands in prison.

After sitting in prison for a goodly amount of time, Pharaoh takes notice of him and makes him second in command in Egypt. All this happened so that at just the right time God could keep his promise to Abraham and save the Hebrew people.

Now consider Moses. Moses survived when all male Hebrew babies were to be killed. Moses grew up in Pharaoh's household, but he had to go on the lam after he killed a Egyptian soldier who was beating a Hebrew slave. Moses then spent 40 wandering around in the Midian desert caring for his father-in-law's sheep. All of this happened so that at just the right time God could send Moses back to Egypt and keep his promise to rescue his people from slavery.

One more step in this sequence. Now consider the Red Sea. The Israelites were headed out of Egypt. However, they soon found themselves between a rock and a hard place. Actually, they found themselves between the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army.

God stopped Pharaoh's army, he parted the Red Sea, and the people crossed on dry land. All of this happened so God could keep his promise to take the Israelites to the Promised Land. That promise was make to Abraham over 400 years earlier, but God kept his promise – right on time.

Thinking about how God faithfully fulfills his promises – on time – let's turn our attention to the birth is Jesus.

God's first promise of Jesus comes in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve has just sinned. God confronted Adam, Eve, and Satan with the consequences of that sin. The judgment pronounced on Satan contained God's promise: *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel* (Ge 3:15 ESV).

God's promise of a Savior was repeated by the Old Testament prophets.

**Micah 5:2** *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.*

**Isaiah 7:14** *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*

**Zechariah 9:9** *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

Over and over God had his prophets tell of the coming Savior.

When the last of the Old Testament prophets died, there was 400 years of silence. 400 years without prophet and without prophecy. But God had not forgotten his promise. God was not slow in keeping his promise. As our text tells us: *when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law.*

What was God waiting for? Perhaps, God was waiting for the *Pax Romana*, the peace of Rome. The peace that was brought on by the Roman domination of the world facilitated the spread of the Gospel. The entire known world knew a common language and travel was easy because major highways were built by Rome and protected by Roman soldiers. Later, during the Roman persecution, Christians would use this same language and these same roads to carry the Gospel message to the ends of the earth.

Beyond the peace of Rome, was God's control of the Roman empire. Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth. Scripture said the Savior would be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah. To move Mary and Joseph 70 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem, at exactly the right time for Jesus' birth, God moved Caesar to call for a census that would force Joseph to return to his ancestral home of Bethlehem. God was right on time.

God's perfect timing is a blessing for us. You see, at just the right time Jesus came *to redeem those who were under the law*. All people are sinners, therefore, all people are born under the condemnation of the law. But Jesus came to redeem us.

As the word is used in our text, redeem has reference to a slave market. In Jesus' time, people would sometimes sell themselves into slavery in order to pay off debts. However, family members could buy them back. They could redeem them and buy them back from slavery.

What a beautiful picture that paints of what Christ has done for us. At just the right time, Jesus came to buy us back. At just the right time, that little baby boy was born. He came into the world to die for our sins. At just the right time, he came to purchase our freedom from sin and eternal damnation. He came to redeem us, to buy us back, with his precious blood.

But, redemption is only one part of the mission of Christ. Jesus also came to secure our adoption as children of God.

I know a family that has adopted three children. Those adoptive parents love their adopted children as much as any naturally born children. Those adopted children were raised as though they were born to their adopted parents. Those adopted children have all the rights and benefits of natural children.

Through Jesus, God has adopted us as his sons and daughters. The Greek translated in our text as adoption means *placed in a position and rights of one's own child*. Think about that for a second. That is exactly what has happened to us. God has placed us in a position and rights of his own child. We are brothers and sisters of Christ. Because of

Jesus we have been adopted into God's family.

Through Jesus, we have a relationship with God that is closer than a natural relationship between parents and children. Our redemption and our adoption became possible on a cold night, in a dirty stable, in a little town called Bethlehem. And all of this happened at just the right time, because God always keeps his promises and he always does it right on time.