

“The Right Time” by Barb Bodenschatz, Parkland Community Church

Galatians 4

We’ve been bombarded with Christmas songs since September – and I think they stopped only yesterday but I’ve been plagued by the lyrics of ‘Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree’ – specifically the phrase *‘the night time is the right to time to rock the night away’* (don’t know why the *night* time is the *right* time but my guess is that it’s only because they rhyme!

But we’ve all been in situations where we make decisions based on ‘the right time’.

- the right time to marry
- the right time to start a family
- the right time to change jobs
- the right time to downsize

And that idea of ‘the right time’ brought me to today’s scripture from Galatians 4:4-7 – this is the translation found in Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*:

*4-7 But when the time arrived that was set by God the Father, God sent his Son, born among us of a woman, born under the conditions of the law so that he might redeem those of us who have been kidnapped by the law. Thus we have been set free to experience our rightful heritage. You can tell for sure that you are now fully adopted as his own children because God sent the Spirit of his Son into our lives crying out, “Papa! Father!” Doesn’t that privilege of intimate conversation with God make it plain that you are not a slave, but a child? And if you are a child, you’re also an heir, with complete access to the inheritance.*

Galatians tells us that our Savior was born ‘when the time arrived that was set by God the Father’. Some translations say “in the fullness of time” but either way, it means when it was the ‘right’ time. Why was it ‘the right time’? Weren’t there times when God’s people needed a Savior before that particular time? Like when they were attacked by the armies of the surrounding empires or when they were taken captive to Assyria, to Babylon, or when after finally returning to their homeland, they were invaded by Rome? Galatians tells us that the decision to intervene was God’s alone and the timing was God’s alone. We may not understand God’s timing – but as Isaiah 55:8 reminds us, God says “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.”

Today’s scripture goes on to tell us that this Son was ‘born among us of a woman’ – what’s so amazing about that? We’ve all been born of a woman. But this is telling us that the Savior was human, was like us. And this is an astounding statement. You see, in the first century, shortly after the gospel began to reach the length and breadth of the Roman world, another idea began to spread as well – the Gnostic thought that when

Jesus came to earth He didn't possess a body like our own; instead, that He only *seemed* to have a physical body.

The astounding fact is that our Savior *became like us*. Dave's Christmas Eve message was that the extraordinary became ordinary – like us – so strange to comprehend. O Magnum Mysterium (o great mystery), a 16<sup>th</sup> century musical response written for Christmas morning prayers says – O great mystery, and wonderful sacrament, that animals should see the newborn Lord, lying in a manger! The words express the imagined wonder of the animals by the manger, recognizing the Lord of all creation who has humbled himself to become a part of that creation. As one author put it, "What was it like, Creator, to step into your own creation?" As we continue to celebrate Christ's birth, let this be part of our wonder and praise as well.

Even more a part of our wonder and praise should be what follows in Galatians 4 – the reason for his coming in the first place. The NIV expresses it this way – "*born under the law to **redeem** those under the law, that **we** might receive the full rights of sons*". The Savior is born as a Jew, subject to the promises, the blessings and the judgments of the covenant law that had been given to his people. If he had been born under any other circumstances (i.e. as a member of any Gentile nation), there would have been no reason for him to obligate himself to fulfilling a Jewish law.

Now, sometimes we use 'church' words- like 'redeemer' and 'redemption' – without realizing where they come from, what they refer to, what they mean, the concepts surrounding them. These words are from the Old Testament concept of delivering from someone or something from bondage based on the payment of a price by a redeemer.

There were actually three different words to express this idea – one was a legal term that recognized that the first born male of either human or animal belonged to the Lord and was therefore to be given to him. Human firstborn males were not offered in sacrifice but were 'redeemed' either by substituting an approved animal for him or by payment of a fixed price.

The second word was a legal term for the deliverance of a person or property by one who had the right because of being a part of that same family group. For example, if a man sold himself into slavery because of poverty, it was the duty of a man's redeemer (who was usually his next of kin) to buy back his freedom. Property that was sold because of debt could also be redeemed in order to keep it in the family. (Most famous OT case is Boaz and Ruth).

The third word had the meaning 'to cover' – the idea being to cover sin, and a related word was the word for 'ransom' – the price paid for a life that was under penalty for wrongdoing and was condemned.

When we speak of Jesus as ‘redeemer’, we see in him an example of those Old Testament words. We see Jesus as both sacrifice and/or the payment of the price to redeem us. We understand that as slaves to sin, we are unable to free ourselves from that bondage and Jesus has paid the price to buy back our freedom. We are no longer slaves. And Jesus is our redeemer because **he was** the price paid for the redemption of our lives.

Not only are we no longer slaves, the finished work of Jesus as redeemer has made it possible for us – a people who had not been included in the original covenant - to now become part of God’s family by adoption. The promised inheritance has now been extended to us – we are only now God’s children through the generosity of God. It has been God’s own choice to do this!

As a sign of our new status as his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts so that now, with the Spirit of Christ, we can call *his* father *our* “Father”, “Abba”. Not everyone has had a good experience with a human father. Sometimes human fatherhood is a poor imitation of the ideal set by our heavenly Father - the One who is the source of faithful care, generous and loving provision.

So today, as children who have been adopted into loving families remember and celebrate the day of their adoption, we find yet another reason to celebrate Christmas, remembering it as part of God’s plan for our adoption. And we remember that although Christmas Day has come and gone, we will continue to celebrate God’s timing - ‘the right time’ – the arrival of God’s long-awaited new day that brought us into the family.

Let me read our “adoption papers” once more – as the NIV version expresses it:

*But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the 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.*

As 2 Corinthians 9:15 so aptly puts it – “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift.”

Lord God, we come with awe and wonder at the magnitude of your generous gift – at your perfect timing that brought the Christ Child into a needy and hopeless creation – at the loving obedience that took Him to the cross in our place – and at our adoption as your children – *children* – no longer slaves – who as heirs have been made recipients of the gifts of a generous and loving Father. Again, thanks be to God.

**Benediction:** Beloved children, as you go through your week, go in awe and wonder and in thanksgiving for the love of God our Father, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who has redeemed us, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit who confirms our adoption into the family of God.