

In the Fullness of Time
Bethlehem: A Christmas Series #5
Christmas Day, 2023
Galatians 4:4-5

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

I have a Christmas Confession to make this morning. It is this: my timing is less than perfect and sometimes flat out terrible. I know you'll find this difficult to believe, church, but this week was one of those weeks where it was flat out terrible. My wife, daughter, and son left on Thursday to drive to Tryon, NC for Christmas. When they left Vero Beach, FL, it was 65 degrees. When they arrived in Tryon, NC, it was 5 degrees. As a result, my wife sent a picture of herself with a massively large coat and top hat with the following message: "what do you think?" I should have said: "you look great." That absolutely was true. She did. But I didn't say what I should have said. I said this instead: "you look like an old maid from the Great Depression." I followed it with a smile emoji. She followed it up with silence. And that silence gave the Christmas songs "Silent Night" and "There's No Place Like Home for the Holidays" a whole different kind of feel this year for me.

My timing is always less than perfect and sometimes flat out terrible. But, church, I want to tell you as concisely and to the point as I can this morning that there is one element of the first Christmas story that is just as true today as it was for Mary, Joseph, the Magi, the Shepherds, the Angels, and even Herod. It is this: God's timing is always perfect. It's never off. It's never terrible. God is never too late, nor is He too early. Instead, He is always right on time.

To demonstrate that for you this Christmas morning, I want to draw your attention to just two verses from the Book of Galatians. You've read these verses a thousand times, I'm sure. But you've probably never associated them with Christmas. But, friends, these verses had everything to do with the timing of God on that first Christmas morning. And they have everything to do with this Christmas morning 2023 years later. They found in Galatians 4:4-5.

⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

1. The When of God's Timing

- In the Text: "*but when the set time had fully come.*" There are two phrases that describes the first Christmas in relation to God's perfect timing: (a) "Set time" – it means "at an appointed time at a particular point in history." (b) "fully come" – It means to "bubble." It is the image of a cooking pot bubbling to the top and about to spill over. Together they denote the concept of the first Christmas came at a time appointed by God, a time when the world was ripe for it, a time when the pot of circumstances was bubbling over.
- In Fuller Context: Paul was right. The appointed time God had to orchestrate the first Christmas was the just at the right time. It was the Pax Romana: That phrase means "the period of Roman peace." The story of Rome is the story of bloodshed and conquest. It was before with Julius Caesar. It was after with Nero, Diocletian, and Claudius. But during the time Jesus became flesh, Caesar Augustus instituted a period of peace. One where Rome marched against no one and lasted for the duration of Jesus' ministry. All Roads Led to Rome: When the Romans conquered, they built roads. When Jesus came, the Holy Land had a road system that hadn't had before. This meant Jesus could travel. The Language of the New Testament: Literacy

was a problem in the ancient world. Many people couldn't read and write. But this changed when the Greek's Hellenized Asia Minor and North Africa. People could read and write Greek. But not classical Greek like Homer, Aristotle, and Plato. They read and wrote in Koine Greek: the street language for everyday people. It also happens to be the language of the New Testament, not by coincidence. People read the message and could. The Desire of the Jews: They longed for a Messiah. And they got one. At just the right time.

- App: God wasn't too late or too early. He was right on time. So it is with you.

2. The Who of God's Timing

- In the Text: "God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law." This phrase tells us what God decided to do at the appointed time.
- In Fuller Context: (1) "God sent his son" – Notice Paul says God "sent." Jesus has always existed before the foundation of the world because He's God. The Father just "sent" him because the world needed Him. It still does. (2) "Born of a woman" – Though He is the Son of God, Jesus is also fully human. He was subjected to the same things we are. He faced the same issues we face. He dealt with death, loss, grief, joy and sorrow. (3) "Born under the law." (3) "Born under the law" – George Fredrick Handel used this very phrase as an inspiration for Joy to the World with these words: *"No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make His blessings flow. Far as the curse is found. Far as, far as, the curse is found."*
- App: Paul addresses the subject of timing with the clearest explanation of Jesus' divinity and humanity for a reason: If He knew what He was doing on that first Christmas, He still does in your life and mine right now.

3. The Why of God's Timing

- In the Text: *to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.*
- In Fuller Context: I love the conclusion of verse five because Paul explains why Jesus came to this earth in a manger in Bethlehem in the first place: (a) to redeem – to buy back. It begs the question: buy back from what? The answer is to buy back from the curse of sin. That's one reason he came. But not the only reason. (b) to adopt – the phrase "might receive" is passive voice. That means the action comes from another party. That party is God. God is the one doing the adopting.
- App: "If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist. If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer. But our greatest need is FORGIVENESS, so God sent us a SAVIOR." – Author Unknown.

Merry Christmas Everyone.