

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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First Sunday After Epiphany, January 10, 2021

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 90, 80:1, 99, 106, 84:5-6.

Lessons: Isaiah 63:7-9, Galatians 3:26 – 4:8, John 1:1-18.

Sermon Text: Galatians 4:4-7.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

I think that most people know that there are “right times” to do something and “wrong times” to do that same thing. Today we’re going to talk about the “right time” for something to happen.

This was all part of God’s eternal plan, and he had it planned out to the tiniest detail.

AT THE RIGHT TIME, GOD SENT THE SAVIOR TO MANKIND

- 1. God didn’t send the Savior when men thought he should.**
- 2. God sent the Savior so that all men might come to faith and be saved eternally.**

As you heard in our Epistle lesson, Paul has been talking about sonship and being under law until the father considers the heir capable of doing what he must do.

We who believe are God’s adopted sons and heirs. We have the full rights of sons and are to inherit everything our heavenly Father, the true God, wants us to have.

But in order to do that, it was necessary to redeem us, to buy us back from Satan, and death, and the sin that holds us captive. So Paul writes by inspiration of God: ***“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 the full rights of sons.”***

At the right time in history. God knew when the proper time had arrived. Even we, humanly speaking, can see many reasons this was the proper time for the virgin to bear the Son of God. The Jewish religion was bankrupt. Paganism had always been bankrupt.

Many historical events had also led up to this time. These included such things as the vast extent of the Roman Empire, the spread of the Greek language and the growing ease of travel throughout the Roman Empire. These also included the extensive dispersion of the Jews throughout the world, called the “diaspora” and the many proselytes who had converted from their Gentile pagan religions to the faith of the Jews. All these things help us see that this was an ideal time for God to send his only-begotten Son into the world, so ***“that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*** (John 3:16)

It was the right time in history. In the year that a census was to be made, which was called “taxing” in the King James Version, the Roman emperor Caesar August decreed this should be done. The governor of Syria is named to further narrow down exactly when this happened. The Word of God tells us that in the sixth month of the pregnancy of Elisabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, ***“God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.”*** (Luke 1:26-27) Jesus’ mother Mary lived in Nazareth. But the Savior to be born, a descendant of the great king David, must be born in Bethlehem as Micah foretold. Bethlehem was the ancestral home of Mary and her betrothed husband Joseph. From Nazareth to Bethlehem was a distance of about 70 to 80 miles, which would take from four days to as long as a week walking, and Mary was very pregnant. Because of Mary’s pregnancy, Joseph and Mary would likely have wanted to stay in the town in which they had been living, Nazareth. But we read that Joseph obeyed the command of the Roman emperor about this census.

“Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.” (Luke 2:4-5 KJV)

God saw to it that his only-begotten Son would be born of the Virgin Mary in just about the most humble circumstances imaginable. ***“And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.”*** (Luke 2:6-7 KJV)

So that the angels could appear to shepherds in the field at night, the time of year and time of day – really night – was right so that angels could come and appear to shepherds in their fields with the brightness of the glory of the Lord. All these events also helped the spread of the Gospel after the birth of Jesus. We read that when the shepherds ***“had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,”*** (Luke 2:17 NIV)

What God knew and regarded as ***“the fullness of the time”*** (KJV) has now come. Paul gives no further details about ***“the fullness of the time”*** because God’s ways are higher than our ways. We do not now, in our earthly human status, understand God’s ways and times of doing things.

But it wasn’t just the right time for this family, in this town, and for these shepherds. It was the right time for mankind. Mankind had expected the coming of a Savior from sin ever since Eve bore her first child. That she had faith that the Lord would send a descendant to crush the head of Satan is apparent from her words when she ***“gave birth to Cain. She said, ‘With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.’”*** (Genesis 4:1) Eve acknowledges the help of the Lord in her childbirth pains.

God gave additional promises to mankind as recorded in the Bible. Such promises, given to Abraham and his descendants, are evidence that God’s time was not yet come, but expected soon. Abraham waited, although his sinful flesh was sometimes impatient, for the birth of his and Sarah’s son Isaac 25 years after God’s promise was first given that through him and his descendants ***“all peoples on earth will be blessed.”*** (Genesis 12:3 NIV)

God’s people waited and waited. The entire Old Testament is a history of that waiting and the troubles that came to them, surely making them wish, hope and pray that God would send a Savior now. Although the descendants of Abraham would go to Egypt to escape a famine, they would be there for over 400 years, where God would grow them into a large nation despite living in slavery. After the escape from Egypt through the Red Sea they would wander 40 years in the wilderness because of their sins. As they entered the promised land of Canaan, they would be faced with large and powerful nations as enemies. Even after being settled in the land of great abundance, they waited. Even as they strayed from the worship of the true God and were eventually dragged off to captivity in Babylon, there were faithful ones among them who were waiting desperately, sometimes patiently, sometimes impatiently, for the Savior to come.

The Jews, descendants of Abraham, had wanted the Messiah to come much sooner, but God’s time wasn’t right.

But this Savior was to be more than just a Savior for the Jews. This Savior was to redeem all people who were being held captive by the law. That is all men. Because of their sins, all of mankind was condemned to eternal death and damnation in hell. The law of God makes this clear. Especially when we look at the Law as a mirror, we realize that no one can obey the law perfectly enough to earn their own salvation. Thus we and all mankind are prisoners of the law.

And then, after the book of Malachi closes the Old Testament, God seemed to be silent for 400 years. Then finally, with the arrival of John the Baptist, the time had come. John said: ***“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’”*** John 1:29-30 (NIV)

Then Jesus came. ***“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 the full rights of sons.”***

Then the Gospel, the Good News of what Jesus Christ did for mankind is revealed in the complete New Testament record, especially in the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Matthew makes it clear that the virgin would bear a son and Joseph was ***“to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*** (Matthew 1:21) John summarizes it in these familiar words: ***“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*** (John 3:16)

Jesus, God’s Son, the Savior, was born as a human, born of a woman, born to live under the law, to fulfill the law and in that way to purchase our Christian freedom. When the Son of God became man, to end this domination of Satan and sin once for all, he placed himself under the law. He who was greater than all law placed himself under law just as he who was greater than his mother became her child. This was an act of voluntary humiliation on the part of the omnipotent Son of God. Every time we confess our faith in the Apostolic Creed we speak of his humiliation with the words: “Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost; born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried.”

Unlike an ordinary human being, he was not subject to the demands of God’s law, for he himself was the Lawgiver. But God subjected him to the law, and Christ willingly submitted to this humiliation.

He was commissioned, he was anointed, he was sent out on a mission which would end his life on the cross, suffering all the torments of hell in our place, for us, so that we – and all mankind – should not have to suffer that punishment.

God’s son set free all those who were under law. In his obeying God’s law as well as civil laws perfectly, we recognize what has been called Jesus’ active obedience. In coming to earth as true God and true man, he willingly placed himself under God’s law and also kept it perfectly for me, in my place.

His mission was to redeem everyone suffering under the law. And that is everyone, all mankind, who, without God, is destined to receive eternal punishment. Not just the Jews, but all men. And because of that mission, this is the goal of that mission of Jesus: that we might be sons of God. Although we are adopted sons, we still receive the full rights of sons, even though we were, by nature, because of our sinful flesh and nature, sons of Belial, sons of the devil, children of Satan.

As a result of this humbling of himself, ***“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.”***

God sent the Holy Spirit to work faith our hearts. He calls out “Father”, referring to God. We have a heavenly Father. We are no longer slaves to Satan, slaves to sin, slaves to death, but sons. And because God has made us sons, we shall also inherit everything our heavenly Father wants us to have. Here on earth that includes the forgiveness of sins, the knowledge that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior, the assurance of faith that I am justified before God through Christ, peace with God, the hope of heaven, the witness that I am a child of God, comfort in all tribulation, confidence to pray, and all blessedness which Jesus Christ my Lord obtained for me. Remember how it is that you have been made a child of God: ***“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”*** Galatians 3:26 (NIV)

And in heaven we will inherit eternal life with no suffering, pain or sorrow. All these gifts are the possessions of believers by virtue of their baptism and faith, and they will enter into the full enjoyment of these blessings when they leave this vale of tears behind them.

So what does this all mean for us? The time has fully come for you. ***“God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem [you], that [you] might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into [your] hearts [this very day], 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.”***

Jesus says to you, too, today, just as recorded at the beginning of Mark’s Gospel: ***“saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.’”*** (Mark 1:15) And Jesus said, to you, too, as recorded at the end of Mark’s Gospel: ***“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”*** (Mark 16:16) Amen.