

The Good News of the Incarnation Galatians 4:4-5

“Christmas is going to be different this year, “ proclaimed the father as he lead this family meeting he had called. He challenged them to be more disciplined in the management of their time during the busy Christmas season and to curtail excessive spending on gifts. He talked about better relations between visiting relatives and a more congenial atmosphere around their home. And he brought his speech to a climax with a final rally cry, “Let’s make this the best Christmas EVER!” Then he asked, “Any questions?” His little second-grade son quickly raised his hand. And with a sense of bewilderment, he inquired, “But Dad, I don’t see how we could ever improve on the first Christmas?”

That question is the burden of the sermon.

- How can you improve on the first Christmas, when a virgin teenager named Mary gave birth to the Infant-God?
- How can you improve on the first Christmas, when a star led wise men from the East to the birthplace of Christ, so that they could worship him?
- How can you improve on the first Christmas, when King Herod went into an infanticidal rage upon hearing of one who was born King of the Jews?
- How can you improve on the first Christmas, when an angel of the Lord proclaimed the news to a group of lowly shepherds: “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”
- How can you improve on the first Christmas, when an angelic choir sang: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

I submit to you that no matter how special the gifts you receive today, no matter how good the food you enjoy today, and no matter how warm the fellowship you experience today, this day can by no means measure up to the day when Joseph’s virgin betrothed wife gave birth to the Son of God. In fact, your celebration of Christmas today will be ultimately meaningless if it does not flow from your understanding of, faith in, and gratitude for what happened on that first Christmas Day. And if you do not acknowledge, embrace, and reflect upon the true meaning of Christmas, you will miss the beauty of this day in the clutter of trees, gifts, parties, food, and eggnog. So I stand to declare to you that the good news of Christmas is essentially and inextricably tied to the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the Incarnation of Christ is succinctly explained in the credal statement of Galatians 4:4-5: “*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a*

women, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”

These two verses affirm four aspects of the good news of the Incarnation.

I. The Timing of the Incarnation is good news.

The first promise of the coming of Jesus is found in **Genesis 3:15**. Speaking to the Serpent after the Fall, God says: *“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.”* Centuries later, in **Genesis 12:1-3**, God promised Abraham that he would have a son and that through his son and his descendants all the earth would be blessed. Several generations later the promise of the coming Savior was given in the words of **Genesis 49:10**: *“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.* In **2 Samuel 7:12-16**, God promised David that one day he would have a son sit on his throne whose reign would be everlasting. And in **Daniel 9:24-27**, Daniel was given insight into the exact time frame when Christ would come to earth.

Now, the Jews knew these prophecies. And even though they may not have fully understood them, they understood enough to have a deep desire and great expectations for the soon arrival of the Messiah from heaven. Yet, when you reach the end of the Old Testament, the promise is not fulfilled, even though it’s repeated many times. In fact, between the end of the Old Testament with Malachi and the beginning of the New Testament in Matthew, God stopped speaking. And when the ministry of John the Baptist began, there had not been a prophetic voice for over four hundred years. And when Jesus came on the scene, the Jews (who at the time were under Roman occupation) were desperate for the arrival of the Messiah. And when you look at it from a human standpoint, it seems as if God was sitting on his hands, dragging his feet, and wasting time. But that’s just from the limited viewpoint of earthbound creature. Notice what 4:4a says about the timing of the Incarnation: *“But when the fullness of time had come...”*

That’s good news. The Incarnation of Jesus took place according to the sovereign timing, providential orchestration, and perfect schedule of God. Christ was born in the fullness of the time. Now, admittedly, we do not and cannot know for certain that Jesus was actually born on December 25th. But even though we may not know the exact date of birth, the fact of it is so significant it split history into B.C. and A.D. And the life of Christ is the very hinge of history. Jesus is the blending of deity and humanity. He is the intersection of earth and heaven. And he is the meeting place of time and eternity. And the Bible affirms that he invaded history in the fullness of the time, at the right time, at the appointed time.

- It was a time of prophetic fulfillment.
- It was a time of religious fervor.
- It was a time of international peace.
- It was a time of moral decline.

- It was a time of cultural harmony.

And in the fullness of time, God sent his son into the world. The Incarnation was no last minute solution for sin. It was not a hastily thrown together rescue mission. It was not too early or too late. It was the fullness of time. And so the first bit of good news proclaimed in the Incarnation is that God's timing is perfect. Because God is God, there are no such things as accidents. Nothing just happens, but everything happens according to God's sovereign timetable. And God's timing is perfect. He is never late and he is never early. He's always right on time. And proved that ultimately by sending his son in the fullness of the time.

Let me put a footnote here: **Jesus will come again in the fullness of time.**

Acts 17:30-31 – *“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”*

2 Peter 3:9 – *“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance.”*

Revelation 22:12-13 – *“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”*

II. The Source of the Incarnation is good news.

4:4b is the central clause of this sentence. It is a statement that tells us how much the Incarnation cost God: *“God sent forth his Son.”* “Sent forth” translates the Greek **exapostello** (**ex** means “out of” or “away,” and **apostello** means “set apart”). And it means to send forth or send away. It's a general term that can refer to sending an army off to war, commissioning a person for some duty, or even banishing someone. And Paul uses it here to speak of the source of the Incarnation. God sent forth his son. The statement assumes the Preexistence of Christ. That is, Christ is co-equal and co-eternal with God. And when a Savior was needed to be man's Substitute, God sent his own Son. And I declare that the source of the Incarnation is good news because it tells us that when a Savior was needed, God gave us his very best. When Adam and Eve ate us out of house and home, God didn't just send Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God didn't just send Moses and Joshua. God didn't just send David and Solomon. God didn't just send Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. God didn't just send prophets, apostles, and angels. God sent forth his Son.

Imagine you are a criminal – a pretty good criminal who has avoided the law for some time. But finally they catch you. You are arrested, charged, convicted, and sentenced. And the punishment fits the crime: death. And you have exhausted all of

your appeals in a futile effort for a reduced sentence. So there you are on death row, awaiting your day of execution. You try not to think about it. You try to ignore reality, but it keeps popping up in your thoughts no matter what you do. You are doomed. And you can't help but get quiet when you hear footsteps outside your cell, as you wonder if they're coming for you. And, indeed, one day those footsteps stop outside your cell. The door opens. And to your surprise, in walks the judge who sentenced you. "What are you doing here?" you scream in anger. When you calm down, he explains that his heart went out to you as he heard your case. He wanted to do something to help you, but you were guilty. And justice demanded that you be convicted and sentence. But today he comes to tell you that you are free to go. You don't ask questions, you just get your stuff and get out of there. But as they're leading you out, they're leading someone else in. "Who is he?" you ask. The judge tells you that someone had to pay your penalty. And when he told this fellow about your situation, he volunteered to take your place. "But I want you to know," admonishes the judge, "this man has done nothing wrong. He's totally innocent. In fact, he's the best person I've ever met. And I ought to know; he's my Son."

That's the good new of the Gospel.

John 3:16-17 – *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."*

1 John 4:9-10 – *"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."*

1 John 4:14 – *"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world."*

III. The Manner of the Incarnation is good news.

A little girl, who had heard sounds in the dark, became afraid and couldn't sleep. So she rushed into her parent's bedroom, begging to sleep with them, but they refused. Instead, they prayed with her, sent her back to her room, and told her to remember that God would be with her. She went back to her room and tried to sleep, but it didn't work. So she went back to her parent's room, only to be sent away again with the reminder that God was with her. So she went again to the room and tried to sleep. And, again, it didn't work. So she made her way to her parent's room one more time. And this time they were a little less patient. "Didn't we pray with you?" they scolded. "Didn't we tell you that God was with you? What's the problem?" Her reply is classic: "God doesn't have any skin on him!"

Before the Incarnation, every method God used to declare his love was misunderstood. God didn't have any skin. And so expressions of love (like the Law of Moses) were views as acts of divine tyranny. But in the Incarnation, God perfectly declared his love for us. He spoke in a language that we could understand. And he did so by becoming one of us. In fact, that's what the term Incarnation literally means: "In the flesh." Paul puts it this way: "But in the fullness of the time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law..." Think about that. "God sent forth his Son" this can only be said of one Person. But the phrase "born of a woman" can be said of every one of us. So much so that it is ridiculous for Paul to point out that Christ was born of a woman if he was no more than a man. But the fact is that on Christmas the Eternal Son – the Second person of the undivided Trinity became flesh (human) in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Luke 2:7 – *"And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."*

John 1:14 – *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son for the Father, full of grace and truth."*

Philippians 2:5-7 – *"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."*

Church, not only does the Bible teach that Jesus is God, but it also teaches that Jesus was human. He was born. He grew. He lived. He ate. He drank. He slept. He cried. And he even died. Jesus was not some phantom deity who came in the appearance of human flesh. Jesus was just as much human as we are. The God who fills the universe imploded and became a baby who, like every other infant who ever lived. He had to learn how to walk and talk and dress himself. In the Incarnation, God's son deliberately "handicapped" himself, exchanging omniscience for a brain that learned Aramaic, omnipresence for two legs and an occasional donkey, and omnipotence for arms strong enough to saw wood but too weak for self-defense.

God became a human being.

IV. The Purpose of the Incarnation is good news.

Salvation comes through faith in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. And so the Incarnation is essential to salvation, because it affirms the Person of Christ. But we must not forget that the hope of salvation rests in both the Person and Work of Christ. The Incarnation alone does not save. According to the Bible, Calvary, not Bethlehem, is the center of Christianity. **MARTIN LUTHER** hit the nail on the head when he described Christian theology as *"theologia cruxis"* (a theology of the cross). Yes, we praise God for the virgin birth, irreproachable life, matchless teachings, astonishing miracles, and moral example of Jesus. But all of these would have availed nothing for our salvation had they not found their consummation in his

perfect atoning sacrifice on the cross. So while 4:4 proclaims the timing, sacrifice, and manner of the Incarnation, 4:5 proclaims the purpose of it.

A. The Redemption from Sin

4:5a says the Incarnation happened “*to redeem those who were under the law.*” The word “*redeem*” means to release by paying a ransom price. It is a commercial term that was used of buying slaves or purchasing the freedom of slaves in the marketplace. And that’s the picture of our sinful condition. In **John 8:34** Jesus says: “*Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.*” Sin is bondage from which we cannot get free in our own strength. And without a Redeemer, the bondage of sin will separate us from God for both time and eternity. And in **John 8:35-36** Jesus goes on to say: “*The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*” The only way you can avoid the holy wrath of eternal judgment is if the Son sets you free. And that’s the purpose of the Incarnation. Jesus was born with an assignment from the Father to die on the cross, where his blood would be the ransom that sets us free from the bondage of sin.

- 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 was salvation, so God sent us a Redeemer.
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Matthew 20:28 – “*Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”

Ephesians 1:7 – “*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.*”

Colossians 1:13-14 – “*He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin.*”

Hebrews 9:12 – “*He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.*”

1 Peter 1:18-19 – “*Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*”

The purchase price for our redemption from sin was the blood of Jesus.

- He stood before God with all our sin upon him that we, through faith, might stand before God with none of our sin on us.
 - He who was righteous was judged as unrighteous, that we who are unrighteous should be judged before God as righteous.
 - He was made for us all that God must judge and, by faith, we are made in him all that God cannot judge.
 - At Calvary, Jesus paid a debt he did not know for those who owed a debt we could not pay.
 - On that cross, God treated Jesus as if he had committed all of our sins so that he could treat us as if we had practiced all of the righteousness of Christ.
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B. The Adoption as Sons

The doctrine of redemption is three-dimensional. First of all, we are redeemed from something (the bondage of sin). And we are redeemed by something (the blood of Jesus). But we are also redeemed unto something (the adoption as sons). And 4:5b proclaims that result of our redemption is “*so that we might receive adoption as sons.*” When a man would redeem a slave, it was for only one of two reasons: to set him free or to personally enslave him. But a man would not redeem a slave, take him home, and make him the heir of his estate. But that’s the good news of the Incarnation. God dispatched his son to the marketplace of sin, in order to set us free from its bondage. But the grace and mercy of God doesn’t stop there. For in Christ, not only does God redeem us but he also adopts us. The moment you are saved, God takes you from slavery to sonship. He adopts you as his own.

John 1:11-12 – *“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”*

Romans 8:15 – *“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”*

Ephesians 1:5-6 – *“He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.”*

Now, don’t confuse adoption with regeneration. Regeneration is the act of the Holy Spirit taking a heart that is dead in trespasses and sins and making it alive to Christ. It is the radical change God makes in us so that we can know, acknowledge, and believe the Gospel. But adoption speaks of the resulting relationship with God enjoyed by those who receive regeneration. We are adopted into God’s family. And we are adopted as sons. Don’t let the desire for inclusive gender language cause you to miss the blessing of this text. 4:1-3 says: *“I mean that the heir, as long as he is a*

child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by this father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.” Get that. In spite of sin, God has always had children in this world. But they were under bondage. So how does God move his children from where they are to where he wants them to be? *“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.”* God doesn’t want you to be a slave. So in redemption, he doesn’t just make you his child. He puts you in the place of a son. He makes you an heir. He gives you access to riches, rule, and righteousness.

BLESSED ASSURANCE, JESUS IS MINE
OH WHAT A FORETASTE OF GLORY DIVINE
HEIR OF SALVATION, PURCHASE OF GOD
BORN OF HIS SPIRIT, WASHED IN HIS BLOOD

In closing, let me point out one more word in the text. It’s the word “receive.” We receive the adoptions as sons. We are not forgiven because we deserve it. We are not saved because we worked for it. And we are not redeemed because we earn it. Independent of any good works we do, God adopts us into his family through the agency of Jesus Christ and his perfect atoning sacrifice on the cross. The good news of the Incarnation is that in order to be saved all we have to do is receive by faith what God has done for us through his Son. Hallelujah.

- Only a phony god would be pleased with our self-righteousness.
- Only a temperamental god would be satisfied with sacrifices.
- Only a puny god would be impressed with our pain.
- Only a heartless god would sell salvation to the highest bidder.
- And only a holy, sovereign, and gracious God would step out of eternity into time and do for us what we could never do for ourselves.

And that’s what God did for us.

Billy Sunday, the great evangelist of a century ago, was helping workers take down the tent after a meeting, when a young man came running in. Out of breath, the young man said, “I wanted to come to the revival, but I missed the meeting. But please tell me, what must I do to be saved?” Sunday simply responded, “You’re too late,” and kept on taking down the tent.

The young man responded, “Just because I missed the meeting, you’re not going to tell me how to be saved?”

Sunday said, “No, you’re too late to do anything to be saved, because Jesus did it all almost two thousand years ago. Now you must receive the finished work of Jesus Christ.”

What good news! Because of what Jesus did on the cross, you don't have to do anything. God has offered salvation free of charge through the offering of his beloved Son. So don't try to earn his love, just receive it.

ALAS, INDEED, MY SAVIOR BLEED, AND DID MY SOVEREIGN DIE.
WOULD HE INVOKE THAT SACRED HEAD FOR SUCH A WORM AS I?

WHAT IT FOR SINS THAT I HAD DONE HE GROANED UPON THE TREE?
AMAZING PITY! GRACE UNKNOWN! AND LOVE BEYOND DEGREE!

AT THE CROSS, AT THE CROSS, WHERE I FIRST SAW THE LIGHT
AND THE BURDENS OF MY HEART WERE ROLLED AWAY.
IT WAS THERE BY FAITH I RECEIVED MY SIGHT
AND NOW I AM HAPPY ALL THE DAY!