"The Fullness of Time"

Galatians 4:4 says, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law…". The Good News translation has it: "But when the right time finally came."

Jesus was born just at the right time – just when everything was in place! If you read any good Introduction to the New Testament, you will no doubt see that the birth of Jesus took place exactly when the events of history converged to set the stage for His coming!

During the last several centuries before the coming of Jesus, the Jews had suffered under the Seleucids of Syria, then Rome, so that by the Jesus came on the scene, the flames of hope had been fanned, and the Jews were looking for God to send a Messiah who would overcome the evil kingdoms and set up God's rule of peace and righteousness. There was a readiness within Judaism for a Deliverer, a Savior.

William Barclay, in his commentary on the coming of the Wise Men (the Magi), reminds us that even the *pagan* world sensed that something of immense importance was about to happen. Barclay writes: "Just about the time when Jesus was born, there was in the world a strange feeling of expectation, a waiting for the coming of a king. Even the Roman historians knew about this…Seutonius could write, 'There had spread all over the Orient an old and established belief, that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judaea to rule the world'…Tacitus tells of the same belief that 'there was a firm persuasion…that at this very time the East was to grow powerful, and rulers coming from Judaea were to acquire universal empire'".

The authors of a much used textbook, *Understanding the New Testament,* point this out: "(People) searched for a religion that would deliver them from the evils of this world and would provide a promise of new life in the next."

By the time of Jesus, Roman rule and the Roman Empire provided unity, good roads and a system of travel, and relative peace and security that enabled the message of Jesus to take root and spread.

And by the time of Jesus, a colloquial Greek was spoken throughout the civilized world. For the first time an everyday Greek language unified the world, and provided a means of spreading the good news of Jesus to every corner of the known world.

Galatians 4:4: "When the fulness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son". All of this suggests several things: *One is: God is on time!* In the years and the centuries leading up to the birth of Jesus, it's as though God was saying: "No, not yet….no, not yet….no, not yet…Ok – *now!* And Mary gives birth to a baby boy in Bethlehem! The right time had finally come! God is on time – He doesn't miss His cue!

Now of course, remember – with the Lord, a day is like a thousand years – so we may get impatient! For instance, the earliest followers of Jesus expected Him to return almost immediately, certainly within their lifetime. And as time when on, and the Lord didn't return,

some began to scoff, and doubt that Jesus would return. Peter addresses this doubt: "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be destroyed with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed" (2 Peter 3:8-10).

God has a loving purpose for delaying His Son's return. God was "on time" when He sent His Son as a baby. He'll be "on time" when He sends His Son back to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords!"

Galatians 4:4: "When the fulness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son". *This also tells us that human history is not just a matter of chance or luck!* Maybe you believe that. Many do. That history just unfolds without any purpose or direction - captive to the behavior of people and nations. But the Hebrews of the Old Testament, and Christians in the New Testament, believed God is moving history along towards His purposes. God doesn't leave everything to chance.

Some time ago I read a book about Chuck Yeager. Yeager was a celebrated pilot in World War II and the Korean War. He survived many harrowing experiences in combat. He saw many of his buddies killed in action. Then he became a test pilot, living on the edge of danger and death. He survived when other test pilots "bought the farm" (as they say). Near the end of the book he talks about how he's survived, and attributes it to *luck.* "I was lucky."

I saw this sign outside a church: "Merry Christmas to our Christian friends. Happy Hannukuh to our Jewish friends. To our atheist friends: Good luck!" Jesus' birth at just the right time God planned remind us that the whole human saga is not a matter of chance or luck, but the slow working out of God's purposes.

This doesn't mean we don't have questions about why things happen as they do. People of the Bible also wrestled with why so many bad things happen when there is a good God. But both faithful Hebrews and followers of Jesus were able to trust that God was and is ultimately in control of human history.

The Scripture we're looking at in Galatians, chapter 4, also tells us *God's purpose for the birth of His Son.* "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those under the law" (Galatians 4:4-5). Jesus came from the womb of a woman, Mary. Born under the law – He was born into a Jewish family, subject to Hebrew laws and customs.

"In order to redeem those under the law" - Jesus came first to the Hebrew people – those under the law - to try to bring them back to God. And when He was by and large rejected by His own people, He expanded His mission to Gentiles – to the whole world. He came to **redeem** us "so that we might receive adoption as children" (Galatians 4:5).

Adoption. This is one of the powerful images the Bible uses to describe what happens when we trust Christ as our Savior. We're adopted into God's family! By nature, we're outside of God's family. Separated from God because of our sins. There is a common idea that "we are all children of God". But this is not Biblical! We only become children of God through faith in Christ! John 1:10-12 says, "He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God."

Notice, to those who believed in Jesus and accepted Him, he gave the *right* to *become* children of God! Jesus is *inherently* God's Son. Through Him we can be *adopted* into God's family as His adopted sons and daughters!

Adoption is a wonderful thing, isn't it! Here are parents who *want* a child not biologically their own! Most often when parents can adopt a child it brings them joy! It's exciting! God must be excited and joyful when we're adopted into His family! We don't deserve it! We're sinners! But through Christ we can now be included in God's forever family! How cool is that!

In one of his books, Bruce Larson told of a little boy, adopted into a family where there was a biological child too. This adopted little boy once said to someone, "I have a brother, and one of us is adopted, but I forget which one!" What a boost to our self-worth to know that God offers us a place in His family, that we're a child of the King, because of what His true Son Jesus did for us!

So, we're redeemed – forgiven of our sins, released from our sins. We're adopted into God's family and become children of God.

We can have an intimate relationship with God! "And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba, Father!'" (Galatians 4:6). God's own Spirit comes into us and resides in us, and we can call God "Abba!" "Abba" is an Aramaic word, hard to translate into English. It describes a child's intimate relationship with a parent. Perhaps the closest English word to express it's meaning is "Daddy". We can call God…..Daddy!

One more unbelievable thing because of Jesus' birth:

We have an inheritance from God. Through adoption we become God's heirs! Galatians 4:7 tells us, "So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God."

There is a passage in the book of Romans that fits right in here: "All who are led by God's Spirit are God's sons and daughters. You didn't receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear, but you received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as his children. With this Spirit, we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The same Spirit agrees with our spirit, that we are God's children. But if we are children, we are also heirs. We are God's heirs and fellow heirs with Christ, if we really suffer with him so that we can also be glorified with him" (Romans 8:14-17).

This multi-millionaire was asked how he got so rich. He said, "Well, I started out buying bulk lots of peanuts, and sold them by the bag. I worked long hours, often 12, 14 hour days, working weekends, working some holidays. I put everything I had into the peanut business, but I didn't become a millionaire for another 10 years."   What happened then, the interviewer asked. "That's when an uncle of mine died and left me a chain of four-star motels!"

I have a rich Friend who died and wrote me into His will. His name is Jesus! Being adopted doesn't minimize my inheritance at all. I have a full share as an heir. Some of the benefits of the inheritance come now forgiveness of our sins, the presence of God's Spirit in our life, a relationship with our heavenly Father, our "Abba", the joy of the Lord, the peace of God within, a God-purpose in life.

The full inheritance will come later: a place in heaven, with the Lord Himself. It doesn't get much better than that! All because, just at the right time, God sent His Son into this world to be our Savior!

Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.
Community United Methodist Church
December 29, 2024