

# First Sunday after Christmas

January 1, 2017

**Galatians 4:4-7 – <sup>4</sup>But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son to be born of a woman, so that he would be born under the law, <sup>5</sup>in order to redeem those under the law, so that we would be adopted as sons. <sup>6</sup>And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts to shout, “Abba, Father!” <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave, but a son. And if you are a son, then you are also an heir of God through Christ.**

## Introduction

Are you satisfied with all your Christmas gifts? Did you get everything you wanted? Did you receive gifts that you can use? Are they gifts you can use right now, or do you have to wait until a different time of the year with warmer weather?

## Theme: God’s Given You a Most Wonderful Gift!

Those are the things we want to consider this morning as we take another look at our most precious Christmas gift of them all. Can you use it? Can you use it right now? How does it look?

Paul answers all those questions as he tells you how **GOD’S GIVEN YOU A MOST WONDERFUL GIFT**. He tells you that God’s gift is **TIMELY**. He tells you that God’s gift is **BEAUTIFULLY WRAPPED**. And he tells you that God’s gift is **PRACTICAL**.

### Part I: It’s timely.

Have you ever ruined a surprise by accidentally letting someone open gifts in the wrong order? For example, your son opens one of his presents – maybe an X-Box game. The only problem is that your family currently has a Nintendo Wii. Oops! That probably gives him a clue as to what that present is that’s wrapped in a box about this long and this wide and this tall. The actual opening of the game system is a little bit anti-climactic, even though he’s still pretty excited to get it all hooked up.

Gifts are most enjoyable when they’re timely. And the wonderful gift that God gave to us is just that. In fact, he tells us that it came at exactly the right time. **“When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son.”**

Keep in mind that God is outside of the dimension of time. God’s eternal, and time was created when he said, **“Let there be...”** But the Bible was written for people who live according to time. And the time when Jesus was born couldn’t have been any more perfect. It was like a clock was ticking down throughout the centuries, and when it finally got down to all zeros, the time came for God’s plan to be put into effect.

This is just an amazing verse of the Bible! It reminds us of God’s promise to Adam and Eve to send the Savior. Remember that God never said just when that was going to happen. It seems that Eve actually thought that her first child *was* that Savior. But he wasn’t... because it wasn’t the right time. But look at it from God’s perspective instead of Eve’s. The words of our text, **“When the set time had fully come,”** tell us that God didn’t just have some vague plan in mind. He actually wrote it in permanent ink on the calendar. Thousands of years in advance – even from the timeless time before creation – God knew the exact day he was going to send his Son to earth as the baby Jesus. Peter writes, **“He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.”**

Why was it just the right time? There are several reasons. First of all, it was during the Pax Romana – the Roman Peace. At that time, Rome was at its cultural and intellectual peak. A relative peace covered the empire. The good news of Jesus’ birth and ministry could be spread with ease. Also, along the same lines, there was a common language across the empire. The official language was Greek. Paul could write letters to people in Rome and those letters could be passed around to people of Asia and Palestine and North Africa. Finally, it was just the right time because that’s what God decided. I think that’s the most important thing to remember. God kept the promise he’d made to the very second!

As long as we're talking about God's use of time, let's remember a few more things. Jesus was born at just the right time. He also died at just the right time. You were born at just the right time. You were brought to faith at just the right time. The things that happen in your life – good and bad – happen at just the right time. The day that God took your loved one or the day when he's going to take you to heaven comes at just the right time. The day when Jesus returns to usher in the new heavens and new earth is scheduled for just the right time. David wrote, **"My times are in your hands."** Doesn't that make you feel good? It takes worry out of the picture.

Also remember that Paul tells us, **"Now is the day of salvation."** Live each day like Jesus was born that very morning. Let Christmas be a year-round holiday.

## Transition

Christmas gifts are great when you can use them right away. Some people also enjoy looking at presents lying under the tree that are beautifully wrapped.

## Part II: It's beautifully wrapped.

How much time did you spend wrapping presents this year? I've always been the main present-wrapper of our household. Aura Lee writes out the tags and sticks them on. We did all our wrapping after the Christmas Eve service this year. I got back over to the house around 10:45 pm. Yep – we procrastinated until the last minute. Some people take the easy way out and put everything into gift bags. Add a little tissue paper and there you go. Do you ever wonder why we even wrap presents at all? The only real purpose the paper serves is to hide what's inside for just a few brief moments before it's torn off and thrown into a trash bag. To be honest, the thought has crossed my mind to just cover everything with a black tarp, like they do with the doorbuster deals at WalMart or Best Buy. But then the gift opening experience would be just as chaotic!

At first glance, the wrapping around the baby Jesus wasn't very attractive. Strips of cloth with pieces of straw clinging here and there. God putting on human flesh with human blood flowing through his veins. Plain. Ordinary. Nothing like that wrapping paper that some people carefully untape because they don't want to rip it.

But the human wrappings around the Son of God are most beautiful. Look at him again through the eyes of your faith and see how beautiful he is. **"God sent his Son to be born of a woman, so that he would be born under the law."**

Jesus is a gift like no other. In his wisdom, God gave us just the right gift. He's not given to be placed on a shelf or stashed away in a closet where so many of our gifts end up. He was sent out from God as his representative. He was the Prophet to preach God's good news. He was the Priest to offer the perfect sacrifice and to intercede for us. He was the King to protect us and provide for us and rule in our hearts.

He's God's own Son. Eternal, unchanging, loving. But he's also Mary's son. This God-Man was the perfect gift who alone could accomplish God's plan of Salvation.

He was born under the law. God knew that we could never fulfill the demands of the law. We're absolute sinners. But **"God sent his Son to be born of a woman, so that he would be born under the law."** And we can confidently say that he's kept God's law perfectly. The covenant that God established with Israel at Mt. Sinai has been completed in Jesus.

## Transition

What a timely gift! What a beautiful gift! But is God's Christmas gift to you one that's practical? Let's see.

### **Part III: It's practical.**

Did you ever open a gift and say, "O neat... What is it?" We don't always use our gifts for the purpose for which they were intended. God gave his gift for just the right purpose. Why did God send his Son? **"...in order to redeem those under the law."** In other words, to buy back all people from their slavery to sin. We're no longer hopelessly doomed to hell by the curse of the law. And neither is your unbelieving family member or neighbor. That's all the more reason to tell him or her about God's gift. Remember for yourself the ransom price the Christ paid – his own life blood.

There's a second purpose – **"...so that we would be adopted as sons. And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts to shout, "Abba, Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son. And if you are a son, then you are also an heir of God through Christ."** Through God's wonderful Christmas gift to you, you're one of God's adopted children. And as such, you have all the rights that even his only-begotten Son had. You're heirs of all the heavenly treasures. Through Jesus, you're God's dear children. We – who are naturally God's enemies – were bought to become his very sons and daughters! And you can go to him with your cares and concerns just like a dear child goes to their dear and loving father.

### **Conclusion**

That's God's Christmas gift to you. That's your gift from your *"abba,"* your dear Father in heaven. Some gifts are so special to us that we put them in a special place. We look at them and cherish them forever. So it is with this special gift. Cherish it. Put it in a special place in your hearts. Hold it out in your hands for all to see how much your Father loves you. It's the most practical gift you'll ever get. It's the most beautiful sight for sore eyes. And it's something you need right now and tomorrow and the next day and the one after that. May God keep you in his Christmas grace always! Amen.