

**Author:** **Rev. Ted Gray**  
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### Order Of Worship (Liturgy)

**Congregation:** **First United Reformed Church**  
**Oak Lawn, Illinois**  
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Selections from the Psalter Hymnal, 1976:

**Title:** **At the Fullness of Time, God Sent His Son**  
**Text:** [Galatians 4:4-7 \(View\)](#)  
**Occasion:** [Regular Sunday](#)  
**Topic:** [The Incarnation](#)

337 - Joy to the World!

331:1-3 - O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

335 - Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

339 - Hark! the Herald Angels Sing

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Pastor Ted Gray  
 12/12/2021

### “At the Fullness of Time, God Sent His Son”

Scripture Reading: Galatians 3:36-4:7

Text: Galatians 4:4-7

Do you have a favorite Christmas or advent passage? Or at least a favorite Christmas verse? Perhaps your favorite verse is Matthew 1:21, “*She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*” Or consider Matthew 1:23: “*The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel which means, ‘God with us.’*”

Or, for those who learned the Scripture from the King James Version of the Bible, perhaps your favorite Christmas verse is Luke 2:7: “*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.*”

Or maybe for some of you, your favorite advent verse is John 1:14, *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

Picking favorite verses is a lot like picking favorite hymns. It is hard to do because there are so many favorites. But no matter which verses might be your favorite Christmas verses, we recognize that each one of them emphasizes what our text from Galatians 4 is speaking about. Verse 4 and 5 set the stage for Christmas: *“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive full rights of sons”* and daughters.

Verse 4 begins by saying, *“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son.”* The world was uniquely prepared for the birth of Jesus in the early years of the first century. The Romans had built a network of roads that were relatively safe. News could travel safely and quickly over that network of roadways. The Romans also quelled the work of pirates who made travel by sea so unsafe. The news of the birth of Jesus, and the spread of the gospel, could move quickly and safely because of the way the Romans had been used by God to bring about what Scripture calls “the fullness of time.”

Meanwhile, Greek culture had a dramatic impact on the Roman Empire. The Greek language was the common language of the first century and was widely used and known. The New Testament was written in Greek, and the Old Testament was translated into the Greek language; it was known as the *Septuagint* and was widely read.

The Greeks were also philosophical. With their philosophy they had put doubts in the minds of many concerning the false gods, both of Greek and Roman cultures, which had been worshiped in the past. This also prepared the world of that day for the birth of Jesus.

It was not by mere coincidence that the system of roads was put into place by the Romans, or that Greek philosophers had caused people to question the false gods around them. Rather than mere coincidence, it was the work of our sovereign God, who still today rules over all the kingdoms of this world. It was by God's sovereign work that the world was prepared at “the fullness of time” when Jesus was born.

### **The Eternal Plan of Salvation**

Verse 4 goes on to teach that in this “fullness of time”, Jesus was sent by his Father into the world. The eternal Christ did not come on his own accord. He came because he was sent from the Father. The plan of salvation by which we are saved was planned out long before the world was created. God, being omniscient, was not taken by surprise when Adam and Eve fell for the temptation put before them so seductively by Satan.

Our Triune God had a plan. Theologians refer to that plan as “The Council of Redemption.” Before the cosmos was created, before the earth was formed and set on its axis, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit worked out a plan of salvation. The Father would send his Son, whom he loved so deeply from all eternity, into this sin-stained world. As 1 Peter 1:20 tells us, *“He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.”* The Son would come, not reluctantly, but eagerly *“for the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”* (Heb. 12:2) And the Holy Spirit would apply the merits of the Son's redeeming love to all that the Father has chosen.

To fulfill such a mission, the eternal Christ would have to be born as a truly human person. Since humanity sinned, a truly human person would have to bring salvation. Consequently, in order to bring redemption to humanity, the eternal Christ would have to be *“born of a woman,”* born with human flesh through the conception by the Holy Spirit.

One reason why is that by sharing in our humanity – by become a true human being like you and me – Jesus is able to perfectly represent us. He perfectly and completely understands us, and he prays for us. Hebrews 4:15 assures us that because Jesus took on human flesh, we who believe in him are now represented by the Great High Priest *“who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin.”* Verse 16 goes on to encourage us to *“approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

Are you embarrassed by what you are tempted by? Are you ashamed of the temptations that you have given in to in your sin? Do you doubt at times that you can truly be saved because of the enormity of your sin? I have been embarrassed by what I am tempted by. I have been ashamed of the sin I have committed, and I have doubted at times that God would save someone like me.

But it is at those times of weakness that the Holy Spirit reminds me, and reminds you, and reminds every true believer, that the eternal Christ was born of a woman. Because he is truly God – the eternal Christ on the one hand, yet truly human on the other – he alone could, and has, redeemed us from our sin. And because he has been tempted in every way as we are, he has sympathy for us in our struggles with sin. Because our Savior was tempted in every way just as we are, we can have full confidence in confessing our sin. We can have full assurance that our sin is forgiven, through faith in Jesus Christ, separated from us as far as the east is from the west.

### **Born Under Law**

Our text goes on to note that Jesus was not only born of a woman, but he was also *“born under law”* (4d). Often those who are powerful seem to think that they are above the law because of their status, whether it is from political position, material wealth, or popularity in the public eye.

But Jesus, who is eternal God himself, born in human flesh, is the very one who gave the law. The eternal Christ was present when the law was given at Mount Sinai. If anyone could have said, “I am above the law, it applies to you but not to me,” it was Jesus. But that was not the case for Christ Jesus at all. And the reason why is in the first part of verse 5 where it teaches that he came *“to redeem those under law.”*

Everyone who has ever lived, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, has been a lawbreaker. Even Enoch who walked with God and was translated into heaven, had broken the law, for *“there is no one righteous no not one”* (Rom. 6:10), *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* (Rom. 6:23)

The law condemns all of us of our sin, but it cannot save any of us. Romans 3:19-20: *“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”*

Since none of us can be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law, Jesus had to be born of a woman to redeem us from the curse of our failure to keep God's law. The apostle Paul put it clearly in Galatians 3:10-13, *"All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.' Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, 'The righteous will live by faith.' The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, 'The man who does these things will live by them.' Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'"*

In order for Christ to redeem us from the curse of the law, which we have broken innumerable times, he needed a body to be crucified in. That is one reason why all those favorite verses of Christmas focus on Christ taking on human flesh. Those verses were written to drive home the truth that Jesus was born of a woman and took on human flesh so that he could perfectly represent us, and so that he would have a human body to be pierced and crucified for our sins.

It was no coincidence that Jesus was born at the fullness of time when the Romans had rule. One of the ways that Romans punished criminals was by crucifixion. Not all countries used that sentence of crucifixion for criminals, but the Romans did. And by God's own decree, in Deuteronomy 21:23, anyone who is hung on a tree is under the curse of God. The death of Jesus could not be by any other means except by crucifixion. His death could not come from a spear or sword, from an arrow through the heart or any other means. His death had to come by crucifixion, as he took upon himself, on the cross of Calvary, the curse of your sin and mine.

But when Jesus was crucified to cleanse us from our sins by shedding his precious blood, he did not leave us with a blank slate. Sometimes the redeeming work of Jesus is pictured as him wiping off all the black marks on a white board so that nothing is left but the white board in all its purity. And that is an accurate illustration as far as it goes, for through faith in Christ we are thoroughly cleansed and are given this promise from the Lord: *"...Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."* (Isa. 1:18)

Yet, because Jesus was born under law, he not only removed the curse of our sin from us, but he also imputes to us his perfect record in keeping the law. Consider that Jesus never used His Father's name in vain. He never served false gods. He never killed, coveted, stole or committed adultery.

His perfection in keeping the law wasn't just outward, but inward. In other words, he did not look in lust at the woman at the well. He did not murder anyone in his heart by thoughts of anger and retaliation. Not even the Pharisees. Not even those who crucified Him. He kept the law perfectly, and after removing every transgression from the slate of your life and mine – he writes on that clean slate – the white board of your life – His perfect righteous obedience to every nuance of the law.

Theologians call that his active obedience. He kept every jot and tittle of the law perfectly and he writes his perfection on the cleansed white board of your life. Thus, when the Father looks at you and me, if we truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with saving faith, he sees that our sins are cleansed. And he sees that the righteousness of his Son is permanently engraved on our lives because *"For our sake, God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* (2 Cor. 5:21)

## **Redeemed and Adopted**

This text in Galatians 4 would be so full and rich and meaningful even if there was a period after that phrase in verse 5 *“to redeem those under law.”* Just that statement alone brings us the greatest joy that anyone could ever know – the joy of salvation through saving faith in Jesus Christ.

But instead of a period there is a comma after the phrase *“to redeem those under law,”* and the reason for our redemption is stated in the last phrase of verse 5, *“that we might receive the full rights of sons – and daughters.”*

The blessing of being adopted into God's family contrasts with verse 3, which describes the bondage of being held in slavery under the basic principles of this fallen world. Both Jews and Gentiles were in bondage in the first century. And if you are apart from Christ – without saving faith in him alone – you also are in bondage to sin and Satan. The Jews had the bondage of legalism, and the Gentiles were caught up in all the paganistic teachings around them. But apart from saving faith in Jesus Christ, you and I would also be in bondage. But it is into such a world of sin that God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons and daughters of God himself.

J.I. Packer, in his classic book, *Knowing God*, recounts how the concept of adoption into God's family has been lost in the church today. He writes: “If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thoughts of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all.”

What a blessing it is to be cleansed of our sin, imputed with the righteousness of Christ and adopted into the family of God!

### Into Our Hearts

Verse 6 goes on to describe how since we are God's children, he has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. The same wording is used in verse 6 as in verse 4. In verse 4 we read, *“God sent his Son.”* And verse 6: *“God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.”*

After being resurrected from the dead, Jesus ascended into heaven. But even though he returned to the glory of his Father's right hand he has not left us as orphans. He has not deserted us, but rather lives within us by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

In the highest heaven Christ intercedes on our behalf. And here on earth, living within us, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. Verse 6 tells us how it is the Spirit who calls out *“Abba! Father!”* And in Romans 8, Paul describes how the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words as *“he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”* (Rom. 8:27)

When we are in the family of God, we not only are brothers and sisters with Christ, but we also have the Holy Spirit within us calling out praise and adoration to our heavenly Father. And all these blessings of being in God's family – of being saved by Christ, indwelt by the Spirit, reconciled with the Father – all these blessings go back to those favorite Christmas verses. We only have these great blessings because *“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”* – and daughters.

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At Christmas we go out of the way to make everything pretty and picturesque. Houses are decked out in beautiful lights. Christmas trees are adorned with ornaments and tinsel. Angelic images sparkle. Manger scenes are still portrayed on some lawns. Not even the secular, materialistic holiday can totally disguise the true meaning of Christmas.

But the birth of Jesus, as it unfolds in the pages of Scripture, is anything but pretty. There was no room for him in the inn. His parents were poverty-stricken. He was ridiculed and mocked throughout his life on earth. Isaiah 53 describes how *“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

*He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”* (Isa 53:3, 5)

Jesus was a man of sorrows while he lived on earth. And then he died, taking the curse of your sin and my sin upon himself on the cross.

The biblical portrayal of the birth of Jesus, and all that was entailed in his life, goes far beyond the brilliance of the angels' appearance to the shepherds. The biblical portrayal of the birth and life of Jesus goes far beyond the shining star that guided the wise men to the place where Jesus lived as a young child. The biblical record goes beyond the glitter and glamor to portray the sorrow and the anguish that was involved for him who was sent by his Father at the fullness of time, *“born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons”* – and daughters – the full rights of children of God.

And yet it is through his life of immense sorrow, and through his sacrificial death, that we have the greatest joy in the entire world. Those of us who have saving in the Lord Jesus have the joy of knowing that we are saved from sin and are adopted into the family of God. Galatians 4:6 and 7: *“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.”*

Consider that wonderful truth at Christmas! Consider that through saving faith in Jesus Christ you are an heir with him of the glory of heaven! In the words of Romans 8:17, *“Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”*

It has been pointed out that the two shortest verses in the Bible are directly dependent on each other. The shortest verse in our English Bible is John 11:35, *“Jesus wept.”* But did you know that the shortest verse in the Greek manuscript is 1 Thessalonians 5:16? It commands us, *“Be joyful always.”*

But we can only be joyful always because Jesus wept. We only have eternal life because he died. We only have a place in heaven because he came and took our place on earth, where on the cross he bore the curse of sin that you and I deserve.

No wonder Peter, who knew both his sin and his Savior with great clarity, exclaimed in 1 Peter 1:8, *“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy...”* But you and I can only know the inexpressible and glorious joy of salvation through saving faith in Christ alone.

It is worth noting that the context of 1 Peter 1:8 is the context of suffering. 1 Peter 1:6 points out, *“In this - your salvation – you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”* I know that many of you face heartache, suffering, and trial, for Job 5:8 tells us, *“Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.”* But even in the fiery trials of life, those who have saving faith in Christ have an inner joy, a peace that although assailed, yet surpasses all understanding, as we rest and trust in him who is our Savior and our Lord.

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Almost every Christian has a favorite Christmas verse. But to have the favorite verse you need to have saving faith. You need to have saving faith that God the Father did indeed send his only begotten Son to be born of a woman, to be born under law to redeem those under law that we might receive the full rights of the children of God.

As we approach another Christmas season, do you and I have that saving faith? Do we see past the manger scene to see the true reason why God the Father sent his Son? Do we understand something of the importance that he was born of a woman and conceived by the Holy Spirit? Do we see our sin in the light of the law? And do we see and believe that Jesus was born under law in order to both cleanse us from our sin and also to impute his righteousness to us?

If so, then rejoice in the reason Jesus came, not only to save us from our sin, but to embrace us into God's family, reconciled to the Father, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, heirs with Christ of the glory of heaven, now and forevermore! Amen!

Bulletin Outline:

*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. – Galatians 4:4-5*

### **“At the Fullness of Time, God Sent His Son”**

Galatians 4:4-7

- I. The Christmas story is aptly summed up in Galatians 4:4-7:
  - 1) At the fullness of time God sent forth His Son (4 a, b)
    - a) Born of a woman (4c)

- b) Born under the law (4d)

c) Born to redeem those under the law (5a) granting us salvation and adoption into His family (5b-7)

II. Being born of a woman entailed great suffering for Jesus Christ (Isa. 53).  
But because He suffered, died and rose again, all who have saving faith in Him alone *“are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy”* (1 Peter 1:8)

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