

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

The Nativity of our Lord (Christmas Day 2020)

The Fullness of Time

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“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.”
(Galatians 4:4–5, ESV)

The Church year is filled with important days reminding us of the life, death, and resurrection of God’s Son. There is Good Friday, the time we witness the death of God’s Son; there is Easter, the celebration of the resurrection of God’s Son; there is The Ascension when God’s Son returns to His heavenly home, and there is The Day of Pentecost with its life-giving Spirit. But of all these festivals, it is fair to say that the loveliest festival of all is Christmas. Christmas is the source from which all the other festival days flow. Without Christmas, there is no Good Friday, no Easter, no Ascension, and no Pentecost. Thus, today we celebrate the life which brought us these festivals, that life which had its beginning in Bethlehem over two-thousand years ago.

Christmas is the festival God’s love. It is at Christmas that the Church receives the deepest appreciation of the Gospel message, ***“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 KJV***). In this Scriptural passage it is easy to see the motive power of our salvation, God’s love. We are not saved by anything we are, or do, or ever hope to be or do, we are saved solely and only because God is a God of mercy, a God of love, pity, and compassion, a God determined to do for us in Christ, what we could not possibly do for ourselves, save us from the consequence of our sins. Thus, the central truth of our text today is: ***“God sent forth his Son ... to redeem those who were under the law . . . that we might receive adoption as sons.”***

Our common greeting to others on this day is Merry Christmas, which for many is simply a title for a day of extravagant rejoicing and celebration. But our text marks this day as something far more important. In fact, it is a day unlike any other. Our text refers to this day as the day that marks ***“the fullness of time.”*** The day that the world has been waiting for since creation. The day when God’s promise in the Garden was fulfilled. The day when the offspring of the woman would come and rescue man from the consequence of his disobedience. Rescuing all men from sin, death, and the devil.

Just as God’s creation is marked by time, so, too are our lives marked by time, comprised as they are by birthdays. So when someone asks how old are you, your usual response is to tell them how many years you have lived. But Holy Scripture tells us to evaluate time in a more defined manner, saying to us; ***“to number our days”*** (***Palm 90:12 ESV***) not our years. But most people, when confronted with the issues of life and death and the necessity of salvation in the here and now, simply shrug their shoulders and say, “I don’t have time to for that, I’m too busy living. Come back when I’m closer to death. Come back when my birthdays are numerous.” But we do not know when death will come. Is not this year of COVID-19 a prime example of the uncertainty of life? This is why God warns the unbeliever when someone comes to them with the blessed message of salvation, ***“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts”*** (***Heb.4:7***) When you or I graciously share the message of the Gospel to an unbeliever, God is using us as His messenger. So I can assure you that whomever you speak the Gospel to, they

hear the voice of the Lord at that time. But sadly, too many consider their time more valuable than hearing the Word of God thus missing God's warning, "**Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation**" (2 Cor. 6:2 ESV). So, yes, life is marked by time and events, but there is no greater time or event in the annals of human history than when in "**the fullness of time,**" (v. 1) our Lord Jesus was born.

Just how important the event of our text is regarding the history of man and God's intervention into the life of man, is realized from the fact that it took four-thousand years to prepare mankind for that single, precious event of our Lord's birth. God had admonished the people of the Old Testament to prepare for this great event, telling them, "**But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days**" (Micah 5:2 ESV). So is it any wonder that at the precise moment in human history, God chose that His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ would arrive to the joyous voice of an angel, declaring to shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem, "**Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger**" (Luke 2:10-12 ESV) Then, suddenly, the heavens are filled by a chorus of angelic hosts singing, "**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!**" (Luke 2:13-14 ESV) Then and there, at that moment, God announced "**the fullness of time had come.**"

Life is important and fleeting, regardless of its number of years. More importantly, life misses its true purpose if it has not been received into fellowship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Thus, to open the door for our reception, our Lord Jesus came in "**the fullness of time.**" St. John tells us, "**the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.**" (John 1:14, ESV) Our Lord Jesus is born to assume our flesh, to become man.

For all who understand the consequence of sin, we can see just how necessary it was for our Savior to be true man, to become flesh and dwell among us. To wrap Himself in the same chains that held us bondage to Satan. Coming as a Man, He took our place under the Law, that Law which declares "**the wages of sin is death**" (Rom. 6:23 ESV). By His life, Christ fulfilled the Law for us. He lived life perfectly. He lived a life without sin. Thus, our Lord's life, His suffering, and His death would be the sufficient ransom for the sins of all men.

We can also see how necessary it was for our Lord and Savior to be true God. Only God can make satisfaction for sins. Thus, fulfilling God's promise, coming from the seed of the woman, our Lord Jesus wrapped Himself in our flesh and made Himself subject to the Law, doing this to "**redeem those who were under the law.**" To redeem you and me from the consequence of our sins. Cleansing us from sin in the blood of His atoning sacrifice and opening the door to His Father's heart, a heart filled with mercy and grace, that we may receive His forgiveness for the sake of His holy Son. Our Lord Jesus came in "**the fullness of time**" to take our place, to stand between us and the wrath of God that breathes out woe against every transgression of the Law. This is the message of Christmas: In, "**the fullness of time ... God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law.**" He came to suffer the punishment and death we so richly deserve to save us from our sin. This is the true joy and celebration of Christmas.

In our text, St. Paul also tells us of the joy that faith brings to those who believe in the Christmas message. God sent His Son in "**the fullness of time . . . so that we might receive adoption as sons.**" He came to give us His righteousness, making us children of God, heirs, brothers, and sisters of Jesus that we might live in the eternal joy of heaven. Each of you were

adopted by God the Father at the Baptismal font. In those blessed waters you were cleansed of sin, given the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of faith, robed in the righteousness of Christ, and brought into the family of God as His child. You have been chosen by God to be His forever.

This is God's gift to you on this glorious Christmas Day, His Son Jesus Christmas Day, a gift that is everlasting, a gift that has no equal, a gift that is priceless, a gift that gives and continues to give, a gift that guarantees life eternal with God and with His Son Jesus Christ, the One who was sent forth in "*the fullness of time*" to bring salvation to a world dying of sin. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.