

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Galatians 4:4-7

“But when the time had fully come.”

Rarely does a woman get more impatient than when she is past due with a child. Every moment is spent waiting and wondering. I hate to say it, but, ladies may even become a little irritable in such circumstances; not my wife, of course—I’ll just be at church a lot more than usual in July because of our busy summer schedule here at Christ. When we know such a big event in our lives is approaching, it is hard for us to think about anything else and we want to know what is taking so long. How much more was this true with the birth of our Savior? All of history built up to this moment. St. Peter says that even the prophets searched their own writings, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to learn when Christ would come (1 Peter 1:10,11).

“But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law.” With what did He redeem us? Our Small Catechism declares: *“Christ has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.”*

When the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born under the law, to pay what the law demanded from those who broke it: death and separation from God. “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me,*” our Savior pleaded from the cross (Matthew 27:46). Sins against the law had to be punished because the holy and just Lawgiver demanded it. So what happened? Shake all the cobwebs out of your holiday-frazzled heads this morning because you are going to need every millimeter of space in there to try fit this truth in your noggin. God punished God. Jesus called out, “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me.*” And who was Jesus? He was Immanuel, God with us.

Parents, look at your children if they are here, think of them for a moment if they are not. Remember that day when they were born. Now imagine them suffering and dying in the most horrible way possible. Imagine being forced to watch it. Imagine not only being forced to watch it, but not stopping it from taking place, even though you could. Yesterday, God the Father saw God the Son become a human child. He watched Him grow in stature and wisdom in His youth. He delighted in His obedience and faithfulness throughout His ministry. Then, He watched Him die and was forced to forsake Him so that His suffering could be as cruel as possible, so that He would suffer Hell itself, which is separation from God. He holds back His angels from defending His Son, who is also God Himself. When Abraham was going to offer his son Isaac to God, God stopped Him, unwilling to bring such sorrow on the man. Yet now the God who saved Isaac from death offers His own Son on the cold and rocky altar of Mount Calvary as an atonement for the sin of very human race that was so willing to shed the very blood of their God. Who can fathom such grace? Who has ever known such mercy?

In Paul’s time, a huge portion of the population, in some places a huge majority of it, were slaves, and, as slaves, they were worth about as much as change in your couch cushions. The son of a landowner, however, he was set for life. He was born into privilege, was assured of his livelihood for the future, and was pampered with the best education, the finest clothing, and the grandest entertainment. The difference between a

slave and a son was night and day. Sure, they may live in the same house, they may even have played together as children, but when the age of maturity came, their courses in life were polar opposites. St. Paul writes, starting with the verses immediately preceding our text: *“What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. 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.”*

You were slaves to the basic principles of the world, but now Christ has made you sons. Why sons? Because in Roman law when property was passed on it went to the oldest son. All of you, men, women, and children, are sons of God through faith. In relation to our inheritance, there is no distinction. Paul writes in the final verses of Galatians, chapter 3, *“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*

No slave in his right mind, once freed, would return to slavery. You have been freed from what St. Paul calls *“the basic principles of the world.”* What are the basic principles? In the Greek, it is the idea of elementary things. It is used for the ABC’s we learn as a child. These basic principles are the religious ideas and philosophies we are so good at coming up with on our own. They are basic principles because, if people submitted them to the same scrutiny to which they claim to submit the Bible, they would see how shallow they are. For people to say a loving God would not punish sin, they must forget He is also holy and just. For people to say they are going to heaven because they have been a good person, they must fail to solicit or attempt to discredit the opinions of the people against whom they have sinned. For people to say that they can satisfy God with their own sacrifices, pilgrimages, or penances, they must overlook the fact that God has never commanded such things or promised to accept them. Any hope rooted in the law is a return to slavery and an acceptance of the most rudimentary misconceptions of our fallen human reason. People placing hope in such things must stop trying to give gifts to God that He and rather receive the Gift that He has divinely willed to give them and which He spent so much to purchase: divine sonship and all that it entails. Who would trade such treasures for the chains of a slave, chains of either self-righteousness or despair, the only things the law can give?

“But when the time had fully come.” None of us like to wait, especially for the birth of a child. Generations waited for yesterday to happen. Prophets scoured their own writings to see the day more fully. The time *has fully come*. God was *born of a woman, born under law, to redeem* you. You are sons. You are heirs. You are the very temples of the Holy Spirit. You have an *Abba*, a divine Papa, who has made every provision for your well-being at the cost of forsaking His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. What a miracle: *Man is in heaven and God in on earth!* Brothers and sisters, spend this life checking your new inheritance out, searching the Scriptures with joy, and receiving the first course of the heavenly feast that awaits us in Holy Communion. *The time has fully come. Amen.*