

December 23, 2018
Sunday Morning Service
Christmas
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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AT THE RIGHT TIME
Galatians 4:4-6

Some of you grew up in churches where you recited a creed, probably the Apostles' Creed, every Sunday. Why did you do that? Some folks are sure that the reciting of the Apostles' Creed was mere tradition, a formality that was so ingrained in a particular denomination that to attempt to exclude it would be to consign yourself a number of years in purgatory.

Actually, the recitation of such creeds serves to remind the reciter of some very important Bible truths. How long has it been since you listened carefully to the words of the Apostles' Creed? Let's recite it together and listen.

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;*
the third day he rose from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic* church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Just a quick reminder that the reference to the “holy catholic church” is not a reference to a denomination but to the true Church universal. Did you realize that every single statement in that creed is an affirmation of Bible truth? These are the truths that we say we are willing to live for and even die for. A creed is a very practical reminder of very important truths.

Our text from Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia is very likely one of the creeds of the early Church. Compared to the Apostles' Creed, it is quite short. But then this creed deals with only one aspect of the gospel story—our redemption from the Law through faith in Jesus Christ who has made us His brothers, children of God.

This short creed is the wonderful reminder that what we celebrate during the Christmas season is not just joy, kindness, family, friends, loyalty, and warm feelings. We are celebrating God keeping His promise to send the Offspring of the Woman to redeem us from slavery to sin and slavery to laws that cannot pay our penalty for sin. We are celebrating God giving the most incredible gift of all – eternity, our salvation which brings us into His very family. And we cry out “Abba! Father!” Let's review this wonderful news of how God fulfilled His plan of salvation, the fulfillment we celebrate this time of year.

Christmas is the Fulfillment of God's Plan (v.4).
(The promise of Christ fulfilled).

God fulfilled this promise according to His own timing. It was *when the fullness of time had come (v.4a)*. The “fullness of time” is an interesting concept to consider in light of the fact that God is eternal. To say that God is eternal is to describe Him as timeless. It means that God exists outside the boundaries of time. Therefore, God is not limited to or subject to time by nature. Then what does the Bible mean when it says that God is the beginning and the end? When the Bible states that God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, it teaches that God condescends to humanity who exists in time. But God Himself has always been and always will be.

Therefore, when God observes the works of men, He does not view history in linear fashion, a growing timeline as we see it. God views history from above as it were, seeing all things at once. That is

why God is omniscient and possesses foreknowledge. That is how God knows everything. Nothing surprises God because He sees all things always.

And yet, God chooses to work in time. When God brings His will and plan to pass, He does it within the context of time. This requires God to condescend to work in our time. He chooses to bring about His will in time which He created for us and created as our parameter for existence. Time began when God commanded it to begin. Time will also cease at His command as God ushers all things into eternity.

In the meantime, God accomplishes His work within the timeline He allots to humanity. A simple but amazing reality is that all civilized humanity acknowledges God's control of time daily. It was under the influence of the Church that all time was divided between Pre-advent Christ (B.C. before Christ) and Post-advent Christ (A.D. Anno Domini - in the year of our Lord). This calendar or way of dividing time was developed by a monk in Sythia. It became known as the Gregorian Calendar and has been the reference to divided time in the western world until fairly recently. About a generation ago, it became popular to replace the identifier B.C. with B.C.E which means Before Common Era and to replace A.D. with C.E which means Common Era. It seems likely that this is an intentional effort to avoid acknowledging God's plan and God's authority and power to fulfill His plan.

Nevertheless, man's conclusions notwithstanding, we read in our text that when the time was full, God accomplished His promised will. From the human perspective that the time was "full," there was much evidence by many circumstantial proofs of that fullness. It was a period known as the *pax Romana*. That was a period of peace and relative prosperity. The Romans controlled most of the civilized world and the emperors ruled with an iron fist. In that environment of enforced peace, they developed a road system that allowed for travel throughout the empire. Earlier, Alexander the Great had established Greek as the universal language. As a result, travel, commerce, communication, and wealth presented a singularly focused world.

Those things did not come about apart from God's knowledge. In fact, God orchestrated the human accomplishments. That He gifted, guided, and gave opportunity to the human instruments in His

hands to bring about His will at exactly this time was a divine work. Only He could bring His will to pass. This was the exact time that God chose to fulfill His promise. God arranged all the circumstances that contributed to this being the best time for the Christ to come. But God chose the time.

The incarnation of Christ is God's miracle. *God sent forth his Son (v.4b)*. Jesus of Nazareth, the baby in the manger, is God's Son. The function of God the Son came into focus because of the incarnation. The second member of the triune Godhead was eternally the Son. As the second member of the trinity, He was equal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit in eternity. Paul explained it like this: *Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:6-7)*.

The Son, whom John called the Word, was eternally equal as part of God. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God (John 1:1-2)*. This was critically important in order to offer the only acceptable sacrifice for sins. "In sending Jesus, God did not send a substitute or a surrogate. He came Himself." (Timothy George, "Galatians," *New American Commentary*, Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1994, 302.)

God sent Jesus. And at the same time, it is true that the Son condescended to become one of us. He stepped out of glory to function as the obedient Son to the Father. The writer to the Hebrew Christians attributed the words of Psalm 40:6-7 to Christ the Son of God. *"Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'" (Hebrews 10:7 [Psalm 40:6-7])*. God sent the Son on a mission. That is the meaning of the verb *apostelo*. And actually, the Father did not send the Son to the manger. He sent Him to the cross. The manger was only a necessary stop in order for the Son to become one with us in order to redeem us. Many of you have GPS devices. On the device you are able to identify the address of your final destination. But you are also able to identify places you want to stop along the way. When you do that, the GPS does not confuse a stop for lunch with the final destination.

The baby in the manger was only the necessary step for God the Son to become one with us who need the Savior. It is God's eternal plan for the Savior to be *born of woman, born under the law (v.4c)*. God announced that plan in the beginning. God announced the important ministry of the Offspring (Seed) born of the woman at the inception of sin. He told Satan (in the serpent) *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel"* (Genesis 3:14-15).

Adam's sin did not take God by surprise. In eternity God had already determined the sacrifice that would atone for sin. In eternity God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit determined that God would become the offspring of the woman to crush Satan. Sending God the Son to be born of Mary was all part of God's eternal plan. The phrase, *"born of woman"* was a common Hebrew phrase to describe a fellow human being.

It was necessary for our Savior from sin, our Advocate with God the Father to be fully identified with us even in our weakness. *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15)*. But God our Savior could not be born through natural human means or He would be a sinner just like us who Himself needed a Savior from sin. God inspired Isaiah to promise the miracle of Christ's birth to a virgin. *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14)*.

And so it was. Matthew wrote, *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us) (Matthew 1:22-23)*.

God demonstrated the need for this Savior from sin through His law. God's law required endless sacrifices. For hundreds of years priests sacrificed innocent animals and sprinkled their blood on the altar as a picture of atonement for sin. Especially on the annual Day of Atonement, the high priest pictured a final sacrifice for sin when he sprinkled blood on the mercy seat, the place of God's presence. But none of those sacrifices could fully atone for sin and all of the

sacrifices promised the coming Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The sacrifice for sinners is necessary because all people ever born break God's law. We are all guilty. We are all unable to offer anything valuable enough to cover our guilt of breaking God's law. We all need the Savior. So God created Christmas.

Christmas is the Fulfillment of God's Purpose (v.5).

(The promise of salvation fulfilled)

God the Father sent God the Son to be born of the woman and under the law in order *to redeem those who were under the law (v.5a)*. God planned to redeem people under the law. The need is incomprehensibly huge because everyone is under the law. No one is exempt from God's law. It is true that God gave the written law through Moses to the Jews. But the law, being an expression of God's holy character, renders all of us guilty before our Creator. And nearly everyone is enslaved to futile attempts to keep the law which continually reminds us that we have not arrived at reconciliation with God.

Our only hope is to be bought out from slavery to the law. We are too weak spiritually to break the bondage to sin and the law that condemns us. But God in His mercy and grace has provided the means of escape for us. *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:3-4)*. God Himself has provided the price required to redeem us, to buy us out of slavery.

And being freed from slavery to sin and the law, we are now God's children. In His eternal will, God planned to make many children. Through God the Son, God redeemed us from slavery *so that we might receive adoption as sons (v.5b)*. God not only frees us slaves, but makes us His children. Sinners who have trusted God's promise of salvation through the Son's sacrifice on the cross should be eternally grateful to be delivered from slavery. But we should be even more grateful for the gift of "sonship."

God carries out His plan through adoption. The middle eastern custom was for a wealthy man to take a child not born into his family and place him in his own family, making him equal with his children and giving him an inheritance. We are familiar with that practice in our culture also.

Here is how the principle applies to us. We are by nature part of the family into which we were born. We are not born into God's family. We are born into the family of humanity. The entire family of humanity has been thoroughly entrenched in sin, the character of Satan, since Adam introduced sin into creation. Therefore, we are all born into the family of God's enemy, Satan, and are therefore children who deserve God's wrath (Ephesians 2:3). And left to ourselves, we prove we are part of that family by the way we live.

But through incredible mercy and grace God frees us from slavery to sin, Satan, and the demands of the law. Being set free from the family of sin by faith in Christ's sacrifice, we are born again. We are born again into the family of God. It is the work of God adopting us into His own family. And now instead of looking forward with dread to God's wrath, we look forward to all the gifts and benefits of adoption. What a tremendous Christmas gift.

Christmas is the Fulfilling Experience of Family (v.6).

(The promise of the Holy Spirit fulfilled)

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (v.6). In the fulfilling of this part of the promise, God sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts. This is the gift for everyone who is redeemed. It is supernatural, the kind of thing only the Heavenly Father can do. A human father cannot place his nature within his child. The amazing reality is that when God adopts us, He puts His character within us in the person of God His Holy Spirit. There is no other gift like it.

This is the promised Spirit of Jesus, the Son. Jesus promised to send the Helper like Himself. *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while*

and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (John 14:16-20).

As surely as God the Father fulfilled His promise to send the Savior, so the Savior fulfilled His promise to send the Spirit. And through Him *we cry "Abba! Father!" (v.6b)*. The wording of this promise indicates that we are crying out along with the Holy Spirit. What we cry is significant. In the phrase "Abba! Father!" the word Abba is Aramaic and indicates deep intimacy. The word Father is the translation of the Greek *pater*. Jesus cried out this title for God the Father as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). It is a deep, heartfelt cry to God who is now our Heavenly Father also. The Spirit cries out for us because we are unable in our weakness to articulate how deeply we feel about the privilege of this relationship.

In the end, we rejoice to acknowledge our Father. It is always a struggle to love, honor, cherish, communicate with the Heavenly Father who is absent physically. But with the help of God the Holy Spirit, we are able to cry out with joy because of our relationship with Him.

God our creator could not give us a gift more precious, more effective, more valuable than Himself. To say that on Christmas God our Creator gave us the best gift is a weak understatement. When God who is the Sovereign Controller over all things determined that it was time to fulfill His promise of the ages, He sent Himself to the manger. He became us in order to do what we could not do—live perfectly according to His own law. He became us in order to pay what we could not pay—the price sufficient to redeem us from sin's guilt and penalty. There is no greater God. There is no greater gift. There is no greater joy than the confidence that we are eternally right with God who created us for His own glory. That joy is wrapped up in this simple creed of our text. It is the creed that describes Christmas.