

## TEXT – Galatians 4:4-7

Introduction: What did you get for Christmas? That's usually a topic of conversation after Christmas. Another typical question is, "Did you get what you wanted for Christmas?" The key word there is "wanted." You don't very often get asked, "Did you get what you needed for Christmas." Most of us would probably answer that question by saying, "Well, no I didn't really NEED any of the gifts I received." There is an important distinction between what we need and what we want. As we look back at our Christmas celebration and the birth of our Savior we realize that God gave us exactly what we needed. The Apostle Paul in our text reminds us of God's gift to us of our Savior born in Bethlehem. IT'S JUST WHAT WE NEEDED FOR CHRISTMAS – 1) God's Son born of a woman to redeem us, and 2) the Spirit adopting us into God's family.

### I. God's Son born of a woman to redeem us

- When did Christmas gifts become not at all what we need but what we want? Many years ago under the tree were gifts you needed like socks, a new winter coat, and new shoes because your old ones were all worn out. Now we are given gifts that aren't needed but wanted like a new gaming system, more clothes in addition to the good clothes we already have, and more toys and other gadgets and gizmos – all things that aren't a necessity.
- God gave us exactly what we needed for Christmas. Paul begins our text with the phrase – "But when the time had fully come." Paul is contrasting what God did for us to make us his children. At the end of chapter three of this letter to the Galatians, Paul had stated that through Jesus we are children of God, baptized into Christ and clothed with his righteousness, and members of God's holy family.
- But this was not always the case. There was a time we did not belong to Christ. Although it may have been a brief time before we were baptized into Christ, we were outside God's family. Spiritually speaking we were held in slavery to our own sin. Sinners think that they can somehow save themselves by their own good works. But the only way out of this slavery to sin is to never have sinned. There is no way out.
- So God intervened. When the time had fully come God sent his Son. The time had come. Everything was in place. The Roman Empire was at peace, roads were very accessible for travel, there was good communication, and Greek served as a universal language throughout the empire. This helped to spread the message. All of God's prophecy had zeroed in on this moment like an archer slinging his arrow and hitting the bull's-eye.
- With everything in perfect order God sent his Son, born of a woman. Paul emphasizes that God's Son was born of a woman. This assures us that Jesus was fully human with hair and fingernails, heart and lungs, white and red blood cells and DNA. Jesus our Savior was God's Son wrapped up in a real human body and soul.
- Jesus was born of a woman so that he could be born under the law. Under the law God demanded that Jesus' every motive and behavior, his every desire and action be 100% pure. God demanded Jesus honor his parents and the authorities in the Roman government and in the synagogue. God demanded that Jesus never harbor a hateful thought, speak an unkind word, lust after a beautiful woman, or slander anyone's good name his whole life.
- Our Savior Jesus born of a woman and born under the law is just what we as sinners needed. We had failed so miserably to keep God's law perfectly. Wouldn't you hate to see a list of all your sinful thoughts, words, and actions, your disobedience of God's law both in the good you failed to do and in the evil you just keep on doing. That list would not only be embarrassing and shameful, it would also be quite extensive. There is just no way we could ever save ourselves when God demands holiness and perfection just as he is holy.
- It only gets worse. The law of God that demands also condemns. Each and every sin condemns us before God. Paul wrote earlier in chapter 3, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law." The law as the judge and jury comes back from only a few moments of deliberation and says, "Guilty." The law then hands us over to Satan and the prison of hell. Under the law there are no appeals either. Case is closed.
- But God wanted us back. He wanted us back so bad that he was willing to send his own Son to be born of a woman, born under law to redeem those under law – to buy us back. We use the term redeem with coupons or rebates. When we redeem our coupons or rebates we send them in and get our money or product in return. God sent his Son, placed him under the law, burdened him with our guilt and then punished him on the cross for our sins so that he could get us back, so that we could be with him forever in heaven.
- There is no greater Christmas gift anyone could ever receive and at the same time be so perfect to fit our needs, our spiritual and eternal needs. God sent his Son born of a woman, born under law to redeem us under God's law. I know Christmas is not about giving gifts, but if anyone deserved a gift wouldn't it be Jesus? It's not too late to give him a gift. That gift could be an offering, or better yet give him yourself, a life of service to him. The Wise Men traveled a long way to see Jesus and give him their best and most precious gifts. They understood that Jesus

was exactly what they needed as their Savior. As Luther reminds us - Jesus redeemed us to be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.

Transition: God gave us Jesus our Savior. It's just what we needed for Christmas. We needed God's Son to be born of a woman, born under law to redeem us who were under the law. We needed Jesus and that's what God gave us. We also needed the Spirit to adopt us into God's family.

## II. The Spirit adopting us into God's family

- Christmas gifts are no longer what we need but what we want. That's what we expect these days. As Christians we have certainly received what we needed when God sent his Son born of a woman to redeem us from our sins. But how many people truly appreciate this gift or even want it. The key to the Christian faith is to believe that God's gift of his Son as something we need is now also something we truly want. This is the work of the Spirit.
- Paul finishes his thought of our redemption through God's gift of his Son with the words, "that we might receive the full rights of sons." "The full rights of sons" is literally "the adoption" or "the adoption as sons." Again Paul emphasizes how we were outside of God's family. Sinners are not born into God's family. Jesus said, "Flesh gives birth to flesh." He uses the term flesh to refer to our sinful flesh inherited from our sinful parents. Sinful flesh is the exact opposite of being a spiritual child of God.
- Jesus said, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." We are born as sinful flesh from the moment of our conception, but the Holy Spirit causes a rebirth. Through the Spirit we are born again, this time into God's family. Our baptism is a perfect example of this. Through the water connected to God's Word the Holy Spirit created faith in our hearts to believe in Jesus as our Savior. Paul wrote to Titus concerning baptism, "He (God) saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."
- We were adopted by the work of the Holy Spirit into God's family and have been given the full rights of children of God. Full rights of God's children means that every spiritual blessing Christ earned by his saving work is ours. It also means that an eternity in heaven awaits us. That's where children of God go, to be with their heavenly Father in his house. It's always nice to go home after being away from home for a while. Military personnel and college kids love coming home for a good meal and to have their own room back. As children of God we have been away from home our whole spiritual life. It sure will be nice to go home to heaven.
- Adoption into God's family sure has its privileges. It has its privileges even right now while we are away from our home in heaven. Paul says that the Spirit who gave us sonship, working faith in our hearts, cries out, "Abba, Father." Abba" is the Aramaic word for Father. In Romans, Paul made a similar statement about the Spirit's work when he said, "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."
- The Spirit who is in us groans and speaks to the Father. He calls out, "Abba, Father." What a tremendous blessing this is. While we are suffering in this sinful world just like everyone else is suffering, we have the Spirit himself working with our spirit crying out to our heavenly Father. "Father, help me, take care of me, strengthen me." Unbelievers have many of the same problems that we have but their cries for help go unheard. They are not God's children. The Spirit does not speak for them. The Spirit speaks for us and God hears our cries. He answers all our prayers. This is because the Spirit adopted us into God's family and gave us the full rights as sons.
- One thing to pray for as children of God in this New Year is to ask God to help us grow in faith and make our faith in Jesus not just something we need but something we earnestly desire and want more of. We know that the Holy Spirit works through his means of grace, the gospel in Word and sacrament to strengthen our faith. This means making use of every worship opportunity available to hear God's Word and receive our Savior's body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. This means reading God's Word every day, yes every day. That is priority number one as a Christian. Paul says, "Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ." This privilege of sonship is that we can grow in our faith. This is something we want.

Conclusion: Did you get what you wanted or what you needed for Christmas. My guess is that most of the gifts you received you really didn't need but were things you wanted. That's what makes God's gift at Christmas so special. It's just what we needed. We needed God's Son born of a woman. We needed the Spirit adopting us into God's family. Now may God through his Spirit make his Christmas gift even more special as not only something we need but something in true faith we want and not just at Christmas time but throughout the year. Amen.