

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law,⁵ to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. (Galatians 4:4-5)

God Sent his Son

How many packages did you get through the mail or by UPS or Fedex this year? How many are you still waiting for? It's not unusual in my family that when we open our Christmas presents, someone gets a little box with a picture inside it of a gift that hasn't arrived yet. Of course, we eagerly wait for that gift to come. Even though I'm not a kid anymore, I still love to pull into my driveway and see that there's a package there waiting for us. I can't wait to see who it's from and what's inside. Who sends you packages at Christmas? Ours usually come from relatives or close friends who can't physically be here. Of course, all those Christmas gifts that are sitting under our Christmas trees or that are still on the way to your house or my house really represent the greatest gift of all, the gift God gave us on the first Christmas. Like those relatives who can't be here send us gifts, God, who isn't ready yet to show himself yet, sent that greatest gift of all to us. He sent it from heaven itself. What did he send? You all know, I'm sure: **God sent his Son.**

I.

St. Paul says, "**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.**" This is St. Paul's telling of the Christmas story. All those wonderful readings that we just heard are summarized in this sentence. **God sent his Son to be born of a woman.** That's the package he sent us. His Son was wrapped up in the human flesh that God gave him in the womb of the Virgin Mary. That is a tremendous gift. Just like the gifts we give and get, the packaging doesn't tell you how valuable the gift really is. Jesus looked like the baby of a poor couple who had no choice but to sleep in a stable and lay their newborn in a manger. They looked like just another poor family in a world that didn't value poor people very much. But inside that humble, human packaging, God gave the most precious gift the world has ever received: he gave his one and only Son, the true heir and maker of the universe. The angel Gabriel named that child that was born as God and man, Jesus.

God gave that gift through Mary. The Son of God was born of a woman, which is a poetic way of saying that he was a real human being. A few minutes ago, we heard the angel tell Mary that good news. The Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her so that the Holy One to be born from her would be the Son of God. How do you think Mary felt about all that? I read an article this week that equated what God did that day to rape. It was a feminist diatribe about how religion is evil to women and it tried to portray Mary as an oppressed piece of property. But if you know the story, you know that Mary went on to sing because all generations will call her blessed. Her song of praise is one the most famous and beloved hymns in the Bible. Mary understood that Christ was her Savior and she treasured her role in bringing the Son of God into this world.

St. Paul doesn't bother to spell out the details of Jesus' birth in the book of Galatians. He knew that the members of the churches he was writing to were familiar with the story, just like we are. Paul had told them the story when he was there. In the book of Galatians, he focuses instead on why God sent this great gift. He says that God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law. What does that mean? Jesus was subject to the same laws of God that we are. Who do God's laws apply to? To us, right? They don't apply to him. He's God. I don't get to decide when people have lived long enough and they should die. It's murder for me to simply take a life. But God does that every day. No one ever dies without him deciding that their time has ended. God is holy, to be sure. But the law is something he made for us. So before the Son of God entered the womb of the Virgin Mary, he was not subject to the law. But once he took on our flesh, he was. Not just the human part of him – the whole person of Christ submitted to God's law, so that the Son of God was born under law.

Why did God give us that gift? So that Jesus could keep that law for us. That's really the point here. God has set down laws for all humans to keep. But we can't do it. Think how much bad behavior there is going to be over the next couple of days. Christmas celebrates the birth of a man who cared nothing about possessions. And yet, so often we're hurt and angry because someone else got better gifts than we did. We get angry because we're jealous of the affection children have for other uncles or aunts or even parents. We get

into stupid arguments with relative we don't like all that much. Some of us may even drink too much and engage in all kinds of other sinful behavior because we're no longer in control. Jesus didn't do any of those things. He was the perfect Son of God who came into this world to be perfect in our place. He never talked back to his mother. He never lusted, not even when he was a teenager. He never lied, never stole, never cursed, never was cruel to someone because it felt good to put someone else down. Jesus never sinned in any way at all. Because he was the Son of God keeping all those laws in human flesh, it counts for much more than just one man. It counts for all of us.

Paul said that Jesus was born of a woman, born under law, to redeem us who are under God's law. God did make that law for you and for me. Every law tells you what happens when you break it. God's law says that you die and go to hell. So that's what was going to happen to every one of us. But God doesn't want even one of us to go to hell, so he sent us the greatest Christmas gift of all, his Son, to redeem us who are under that law. God sent his Son to the cross to die for us, just like the law demands. On the cross, Jesus even suffered hell itself in our place. He paid what we owe. Again, because the perfect Son of God died there, his death paid for more than just one man. It paid for all of us. It paid for every human being that will ever be born. That's what redeem means: God has bought us back from death and hell. Now, when he looks at us, he sees us being perfect, just like Jesus was. He sees us washed clean from all our sin. That's why he gave us his Son. That's the gift of Christmas.

II.

What kinds of gifts do you like? When my wife and I were Christmas shopping one day this week, I was teasing her about buying practical gifts. You know what she did? She accused me of sometimes buying practical gifts myself. As horrifying as it is to admit, sometimes I do give her things not because they're fun, but because they're something she really needs. But I would never give her a gift that I didn't think she would be glad to receive. When we give gifts, whether they're fun gifts or practical gifts, we want the people who get them to be happy about it. God thinks the same way. His gift is the most practical gift we will ever receive because it addresses our greatest need. And because it is our greatest need, we naturally rejoice over that gift.

God sent his Son to give us the full rights of sons.

That's how our Bible translates one single Greek word, "the full rights of sons." What is he talking about? Adoption. When you adopt a child, legally, that child becomes the equal of your natural children. Now I realize that fairy tales are full of stories of evil step-parents, but that's not really the same thing. The picture here is of a powerful and wealthy man who has a son. Then he adopts brothers and sisters for that son. Legally speaking, they share in the inheritance of that original son. Jesus is the original son, the one that rich and powerful man always had. But we are all the brothers and sisters that he brings into his family. We were orphans living in the street, doomed to spiritual poverty and death and then hell. But God moved us into his mansion and gave us our own rooms there. God took us to the mall, to all those ritzy stores that I never shop in and he charged up his credit card buying us the kind of wardrobe his children should have. We eat at his table and relax by his pool and vacation on his dime. God added our names to his will, right next to Jesus' name. Now, all the servants in his house call us "sir" and "ma'am."

That's the picture. What's the reality? We were born sinners. We were born without knowledge of God and without any true hope of finding our way to him or to heaven. We were born without any claim on his love. But God made us his. He sent his only begotten Son into this world to be one of us so that we then could join him in our Father's family forever. When the time was right, he sent that good news to us and gave us faith. Now, the angels serve our good. Now, our Father never stops working to bring us home to live with him. We are blessed even in this world where there is so much pain and sorrow and we will live with him in perfect joy forever. Our trust in Jesus as our Savior makes us a part of God's family today.

On Christmas Eve, we like to hear again that beautiful story of the baby who was born in a stable and laid in a manger. We love to hear the angel tell the shepherds to go to Bethlehem and see the child and then to hear the great angel choir sing, "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men on whom his favor rests." We love to go home and look at our manger scenes and imagine that newborn baby, while echoes of "Silent Night" ring in our heads. That's all to the good. But for us to truly understand what makes this gift valuable, we have to move out of the stable and away from the manger and see what Christ came here to do. We have to recognize who the baby was who slept there that night. He was the Son of God. He was equal to the Father in every respect. He was the Lord of heaven and earth who entered the womb of the Virgin Mary

and took on real human flesh and became our brother. He bought us with his own blood. He brought us into his Father's house and made us his sisters and brothers. He gave us eternal life with him. That's the gift God sent us from heaven, wrapped in human flesh. Rejoice in that gift. Amen.