

“The Right Time ”
Galatians 4:4-7

December 29,2019
Christmas

First Sunday After

After Christmas is over in the minds of most people (although we, in the Church, have another week of Christmas to celebrate) – after all of the preparation and anticipation – what more is there to say? Well, people now begin to ask, “How was your Christmas?” “Did you have a nice Christmas?” How does one answer such a question? I think everyone I’ve heard who answer that question says something like, “It was good.” However, what makes a Christmas “good” or “bad”? I suppose it’s all rather subjective.

Instead of asking each individual this question, how about if we evaluate Christmas as a whole? We could take a survey. Many companies do this to evaluate their service and to make improvements. Often, you’ll get a message when talking to someone on the phone or ordering online which asks you to remain in the line after the transaction is completed for a brief survey. We could do the same with God. Please stay around after Christmas for a brief survey on how God did in His presentation of Christmas gifts. I developed such a survey with four simple questions.

Question #1: did God provide a gift that was needed, helpful, and desired?

Many of the gifts which we give our frivolous and fun. They entertain us and amuse us, but don’t often provide meaningful and long-lasting relief for any sort of problem. God provides the one gift that everyone needs but are unable to obtain on their own: freedom. We hear that and may react like the Jews did to Jesus when he talked about setting them free. We may think that we are already free and don’t need to be liberated. We are not slaves. But Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.” (John 8:31-32) St. Paul also says in the verses prior to our text, “We, also, . . . were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.” (Galatians 4:3) The philosophies, attitudes, political correctness, cultures, and so on of this world enslave as much as if we were locked in chains.

The problem is we don’t know that we are enslaved, feel like we are enslaved or realize what enslavement means. It means that we must do what our master (in this case, sin) says to do. If you think you are not a slave to sin, then stop sinning. If you continue to sin, then it means you don’t care (which is another problem) or Jesus is correct. Continuing as a slave to sin and the elementary principles of this world means eventual physical death, eternal death and hell. There is nothing that any of us can do to prevent that. We may scoff at it, deny it, or reject it but that does not keep it from happening.

So God decided to free us from that slavery to sin and the ways of this world. He did this by giving us the very best Christmas gift ever: Christ. That is the reason Jesus Christ was born in this world on Christmas. It was not to teach us how to be better. It was not to help us liberate ourselves. Jesus Christ came into this world in order to release us from our slavery. Therefore, Question #1 is a clear yes. God provided a gift that was needed, helpful, and (when we truly realize our sinful condition) desired.

Question #2: Was the gift delivered promptly and on time? That's a big deal around Christmas: getting your packages delivered to you on time. That's why Amazon Prime is so popular today – two day free delivery. But even Amazon had difficulties this year because of the short time between Thanksgiving and Christmas. I ordered a gift for Becky from someplace not named Amazon on December 14. It likely would not have arrived here by Christmas Day except that this company offered "expedited delivery" for an added \$19.95. I paid the extra money and waited for the package which wasn't coming. I called and complained, but they said it's a busy time of year. Finally, the package in question arrived on Christmas Eve at 10 AM.

How is God's record for delivery? His task was considerably more difficult than even Amazon. Our text says, "When the fullness of time had come..." This means at the exactly correct time. It was extremely difficult to have all of the things come together which were necessary to deliver these gifts. Yet God was planning this delivery from the moment Adam and Eve fell into sin. Centuries of prophetic promises about the coming of the Savior were given and had to align. God had to move heaven and earth to make this a reality. In order for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem, God had to get Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem. In order to do this, God had to get Caesar Augustus to decide to have a census and, as part of that census, require people to go to their ancestral home. Yet God was successful. At the absolute right time – the fullness of time – God made the greatest delivery of all time.

So Question #2 – Was the gift delivered promptly and on time? – is answered yes. Question #3 on our little Christmas Survey is: did God deliver the promised goods?

According to our text, "God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law." The Savior of the world would not be a spirit, not an angel, or not some super mortal. The Savior of the world would be born of a woman – truly human in every way – yet God Himself with us.

It was not only important that the Savior be born human, but also that He was born under the law. God put Himself under the Law which He had established for humanity. Being a human being under the law meant that Jesus would qualify to bear the guilt of our sin under that law. He would also be able to endure the punishment for sin under the law. He would be able to be crucified and die. In other words, He did what was required of us which we were unable to do or unwilling to do.

His stated purpose was "to redeem those who were under the law." "Redeem" is no small task. It means to "buy back." Jesus would have to do two very important tasks. First, He would have to fulfill the law of God perfectly and to the last degree, thus, providing the righteousness which the law demanded. Second, He would have to pay the price for all of our sins. His death thirty-three years later after his birth would not only serve as the punishment for our sins, but also the sacrifice for sin which earned forgiveness.

So, Question #3 – Did God deliver the promised goods? – Yes, very much so. The righteousness of His perfect life is given to you at your Baptism. The sinfulness of your human nature and the deeds which resulted from that were forgiven by His death on the cross.

Question #4 (our final question of this Christmas survey) is one that you will see on some surveys in an attempt to find out and reward those employees who are going beyond the call of duty. So, let me phrase that question this way: “Did God do anything beyond the call of duty which He should be recognized for?”

You probably remember the movie, “A Christmas Story.” I don’t know how you could miss it since it is played twenty-four hours straight on Christmas day. The young boy in the movie, Ralphie, wants just one thing for Christmas: a Red Ryder Carbine Action 200 Shot Range Model Air Rifle. Several times, he had been denied it, based on (what he called) the “mom block” – “You’ll shoot your eye out kid.” After the family opened all of their gifts on Christmas morning, he still didn’t have one – until his father asked him to check out one more package behind a desk. There it was, the greatest gift in the world, the Red Ryder Carbine Action 200 Shot Range Model Air Rifle. After thinking he had all the gifts he needed, the best one was the last one.

We might think that being redeemed is all that we actually need. We might think that’s the last and final gift. However, in the Roman world of slavery, it was not. A slave could be redeemed and freed but that wasn’t enough. He would not be a slave anymore, but we he would have nowhere to go. In fact, however, some unscrupulous slaveowners would redeem their own slaves and free them when they got to be so old that they could no longer provide valuable service to the slaveowner.

God does more than simply free us from sin and leave us alone. He gives us that great gift, but that’s not the end. It’s like opening up all of your gifts on Christmas morning and then finding the best gift, like with Ralphie, was still to come. Paul says that the Son of God came into this world, “to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

We were set free from sin, death, and hell so that we might go to the family of God through adopted as sons of God. (The word, “son”, is a legal term here, not a gender specific term.) God sent His Son to do the freeing. God sent forth the Spirit to do the adopting. God placed His name on you at your Baptism. This is a rite of adoption. We are part of God’s family. We are legally His “sons” – His legal heirs.

What does this mean? It means that we have the most intimate relationship there is with the God of all creation. We do not approach Him in fear and dread, but in love and peace. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we cry to him, “Abba! Father!”, as children approaching their Daddy. We can live lives now of contentment and peace, trusting in the care of our Father. There is more than simply life on this earth. Our text says, “So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir.” That means we stand to inherit everything which God has which is everything. Life in this world gives way to life in heaven. Need and want give way to satisfaction and contentment. Decay and death give way to eternal life.

So, Question #4, “does God go above and beyond?” – The answer is a resounding yes. He has freed us from slavery to sin and brought us to membership in His family.

I think God did pretty well on the survey – better than Amazon or any other provider of gifts. He came to provide for our greatest need and satisfy what is ultimately our greatest desire. We have forgiveness of sin and His holiness without any

guilt; new life with hope and new purpose here and now; and on ending joy and good in heaven forever. He delivered it in the fullness of time. He paid the highest price – the life of His own Son, Jesus Christ. He sent the Spirit so that we might be heirs and possess everything. That's more than a good Christmas. That's a great Christmas. Amen.