

First Sunday after Christmas – December 29, 2013
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Galatians 4:4-7 (NIV 84)

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. 6) Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." 7) So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

Fellow members of God's Family:

I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. With those words the angel announced the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem that first Christmas Eve.

Good news – that's something that we all could use more of, isn't it. When we turn on our TV's to watch the evening news or pick up our papers the news we hear and read about is often anything but good. Sometimes the news is about unavoidable tragedies – like accidents caused by the weather or fires of undetermined causes. Other times the news is about political unrest, bombings and assassinations – evidence of the hatred which fills so many people's hearts. Still other times it's about families whose lives are saddened because they have become victims of crime – reminders of how many people in our society are lacking in values and morals. Some times the stories cause a lump to form in our throats. Other times they cause us to offer our prayers to the Lord asking his help for the families who have been victimized.

The bad News like this helps us to put the angels' news into its proper perspective. We still live in a world touched by evil and sin. We need a Savior – the one who was born as the Babe of Bethlehem. What a privilege it is for me to stand before you again today as I do whenever I preach a sermon and point you to your Savior. Let's use our text to

Theme: Behold the Babe of Bethlehem

1. God has sent him to us
2. He was born under the law like us
3. He opens his family to us

Paul introduced this section of his letter with the reminder that the world is a prisoner of sin and that without faith in Christ we are held as prisoners by the law. (Gal 3:22-23)

Paul knew what it was like to be a prisoner since he spent time in chains for preaching the Gospel. Most likely it would be difficult for us to fully empathize with Paul's feelings when he was confined to prison yet his picture is clear. Sin holds us in bondage, and we can not free ourselves. In fact our human nature would be perfectly content to live as a prisoner of sin since it knew nothing better. In fact our Old Adam thinks that to leave the captivity of sin means setting aside pleasure and inviting all kinds of unnecessary troubles into our lives. God's law reminds us constantly of the need we had for a rescue from our slavery to sin.

Although sinners had no interest in a Savior – God knew that our predicament would lead to eternal death and punishment unless he went into action so... **when the time had fully come, God sent his Son** to be our Savior.

While not many will show their hatred for this gift in the way wicked King Herod did in our Gospel lesson today, the fact is that many do not regard him as a worthwhile gift and they choose to set him aside. It is also true that at times like Herod we refuse to follow and accept God's ways. We like to take charge of things. We like to put our desires before God's will. We like to think that we can escape God's wrath.

Without God's word we would surely know and experience the distress, the discomfort and the destructiveness of death and evil. But we would not make the connection between them and sin. This is something that we learn from God's word. If God had waited for sinful mankind to request a Savior; a Savior would have never been sent because it would not have been requested due to our sinful nature.

In spite of the opposition of our sinful natures God made a plan to restore us to a place in his family. He announced the plan as soon as sin entered the world but generations passed without this plan going into effect. But finally when the time was right in God's mind he sent his Son – the one promised when sin entered the world.

It is only when you and I feel the burden of our sins and the crushing nature of God's law that we will rejoice at the coming of the Babe of Bethlehem. As our OT lesson reminded us in all our distress God was also distressed and so he became our Savior. God becomes one of us -- **God sent his Son, born of a woman.** Make no mistake about it. The Babe in Bethlehem is true God and true man.

The Son of God was born under the law like us. God is the one who is the author of the law – he makes the rules. He is not subject to them. God can freely take life because he is the one who gives it in the first place. God could never be guilty of stealing because everything belongs to him in the first place. But when Jesus became a man he was born under the law. His Father demanded that he, like every other human being would have to keep all of his laws and decrees.

By taking our place under God's law Jesus would be able to set us free or redeem us from the law.

It might strike us as odd that someone would be willing to pay a price to buy back something that already belongs to him. But what if you lost something very precious – perhaps your wedding ring was lost or stolen and you found it for sale, wouldn't you buy it back? We've all heard of parents who were willing to pay a ransom for a child who had been kidnapped. That is what God did for us. He sacrificed his Son to buy us back from our slavery from sin. This shows just how precious we were to God and how it hurt him that we were no longer willing to live as his children.

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...that's the Babe of Bethlehem. The one who lay in that manger was sent by God to take our place under the law. That means that his little hands would be pierced for our transgressions. This little child would be crushed by our iniquities, he would carry our punishment. And so we kneel before his manger and worship him as our Redeemer – the one who set us free from our slavery to sin – and who opened God's family to us.

We were born outside of God's family. That meant we had no rights or claims to God's divine love, power and blessings. But when the fullness of time had come God sent his Son so that **we might receive the full rights of sons.** Paul speaks of us as having the full rights of sons. That is an important statement. When Paul was growing up a minor child had no more rights than a servant in the household until the Father determined that he would grant his child the full rights of sonship. Some parents set up a trust fund for their children – so that those children might be able to go to college. At the proper time the child benefits from that trust fund but not before.

God has set up a treasure for us in heaven and has brought us into his family through the merits of the Babe of Bethlehem. As long as a person insists on trying to earn a spot in God's family by trying to be holy or by trying hard to keep the law of God, that person remains a slave to the law. It oppresses him and prevents him from becoming a heir in God's family. As long as a person continues to turn back to the ways of unbelief so long that person also remains a slave to the basic principals of the world. But Christ brings us a rescue from that terrible bondage by keeping the law in our place so we can live under grace. We have been set free from the no win situation of trying to make ourselves acceptable to God. We are already acceptable to him in Christ. We don't have to pretend to be God's children by ignoring or excusing the guilt of our sins. We are his perfect children through faith in Christ because God has arranged for our adoption into his family and he has agreed to extend to us the full rights of an heir in his family.

All who live by faith in the Son of God enjoy the full rights of Sons. And in order that you and I might have this privilege God has sent his Spirit into our hearts bringing us to faith and enabling us to look at God as our loving Father. Paul says that the Spirit in us calls out: Abba Father. Just as our children would lovingly speak of their Father as poppa or dadda or Dad or Daddy so the Hebrew children would call out, "Abba, I want a drink." "Abba, pick me up." The child would be confident that his need would be taken care of. When the child would be afraid, he'd call out, "Abba, hold my hand, keep me close, take care of me." In the same because we have been redeemed by Christ we can call out with confidence to our God in heaven asking him to take care of our needs to keep us safe, to take care of us to keep us close.

So when those troubling headlines bring a lump to our throats or when we get bad news ... we have someone to turn to and we have a place to go. We have a bright future in front of us. Why? Because the Babe of Bethlehem has opened God's family to us so that we are now God's heirs. Now we can look at things from a different perspective. Now our concerns are not limited just to this life time. Now we see things in the light of eternity.

So as we celebrate the birth of our Savior King, we are also celebrating our new life and the glory which Jesus came to gain for us. As heirs of the Father we will gladly turn to him and his words as we walk through this life to the life to come. What a pleasure it will be to worship him with our lips, our hearts, our actions and our lives. It's no wonder the Christmas songs speak of Joy to the World and the Good news for us. May that joy sustain you in the year to come as you enjoy your status as God's sons and daughters. Amen.