

First Sunday after Christmas
January 1, 2023
“The Fullness of Time” (Galatians 4:4-7)

By Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 1st Sunday after Christmas is from our Epistle reading Galatians 4:4-7.

“4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

Here ends our text.

“Fullness of time”... Time has been on the minds of basically everyone in the world these past 24 hours, hasn't it? Watch parties from Times Square to the living room counted down time to the New Year last night. The ball dropped and at midnight a barrage of fireworks from around the neighborhood went crazy. The fullness of 2022 came to a close and people shouted “Happy New Year” to 2023.

Did you stay up and bang a few pots and pans last night? People celebrate that they made it through 2022...Of course, there were some voices no longer heard last night as the headline news reminded us that Barbara Walters, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, and the 4 college students from Moscow Idaho. The law has also announced that the killer of these young lives has been accused and arrested.

So, in the midst of the celebration, there is always in the background the sadness of the world in which we live – the world which is fully under the law and the slavery of sin, the devil and death. As I watched the first news conference live that the alleged murderer had been apprehended in Pennsylvania, each person, whether it was the police chief or lead attorney who spoke prefaced his briefing by first saying, “we can never bring back” the lives of those four college students but we can honor their lives by bringing a successful closure. That is, in the fullness of

time, however long this trial will take, the fullness of the law can successfully bring to light who did the crime and give just punishment.

Yes there is a fullness of time – under the law, in which we all live. “You do the crime, you do the time” is a colloquial saying. And our text says that a very important person, One whom you wouldn’t think would it would be applicable, also voluntarily was “born under the law”.

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law...”

At that moment which God Himself determined, God Himself willed, He sent forth His Son Jesus to be born of a woman – Mary. The virgin Mary as we heard prophesied in Scripture would bring forth her first born Son and lay Him in a manger for there was no room for them in the inn. Merry Christmas!

God in the flesh. God with us - Immanuel. God placing Himself under the law He Himself created! Yes, on this New Year’s Day, 8 days after His birth, the church also marks this day as the “Naming and circumcision of our Lord”. Under the law, Jesus subjected Himself to fulfill the law by being circumcised according to the Old Testament ceremonial law.

“Born under the Law” shows the humanity of Jesus. It shows us that there was no difference between Jesus and each of us. Jesus had to follow the law- ceremonial and moral perfectly in order to, and this is the most important reason that our text tells us, **“5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”** In the fullness of time, Jesus fulfilled the law, so that we would be fully adopted as sons and daughters of God!

“21 And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.” (Luke 2:21)

Yes! These words “born under the law” lead us right into Christ’s vicarious atonement. Luther said:

Luther: The Law did everything to Jesus that it did to us. It accused us and terrified us. It subjected us to sin, death, and the wrath of God; and it condemned us with its judgment It accused Him of blasphemy and sedition; it found Him guilty in the sight of God of all the sins of the entire world; finally it so saddened

and frightened Him that He sweat blood, Luke 22:44; and eventually it sentenced Him to death, even death on a cross, Philippians 2:8.

This is the Gospel, the Good News of which the angels sang to the Shepherds. Jesus, holy and sinless Jesus, would take upon Himself the sins of the world – your sins and mine- so that He would be judged guilty, and sentenced to death. The Law could do no other. Jesus, whose name means “**He will save His people from their sins.**”

Matthew 1:21

And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

The Bible never calls the Law an evil thing. It is holy and just and good. God is its Author. The final objective of both Law and Gospel is the salvation of mankind. But, Law and Gospel are totally different in function.

The Law cannot save. It can only condemn.

The Gospel saves. It never condemns.

The Gospel says: "Done." The Law says: "Do."

In the fullness of time, the Law did not save Jesus. It condemned Him. He did so in order to redeem those under the law – you me, and everyone who celebrated the New Year last night and everyone who didn't. The world's sins were paid for in the fullness of time on Good Friday, in order to bring freedom from the slavery of the law!

You know, as the whole world went participated and watched the “World Cup” of soccer last month to see which country would be crowned champion...Argentina won with penalty kicks for those of you who didn't see it, there are some unique differences between American football and this European football. And one that stands out for me is the way the time of the match is measured.

In American football, we have two 30 minute halves – half time and then the final score at the end of 60 minutes. Sometimes there's an overtime of an additional 15 minutes. But fans know ahead of time when the match will end.

In European soccer, there is a half time after 45 minutes and then what is called “Full time” after...well 90 minutes and whatever amount of time the referee decides to add on because of injuries or delays. One doesn't know the full the

amount of time until the referee tells us. It could be an extra 2 minutes, or 10 minutes. It's all very arbitrary according to the referee's discretion. At any rate, when that extra amount of time is added, then there is a "full time" score, not a final score.

The fulltime score of Jesus' against the devil looked like Jesus had lost 0-1. Jesus died and was buried. And yet the Good News was yet to come, for the Full Time score was revealed 3 days later. In the fullness of time, prophesied, willed and accomplished by God, Jesus was raised from the tomb – victorious. Jesus 1 – the devil 0. The Gospel 1- the Law 0.

As I watched some of the bowl games yesterday, maybe you too watched them and heard repeated this commercial for Tyler Perry's "The Oval". It's a drama series that takes place in the White House. I haven't seen it, but the according to this clip that kept on annoyingly being repeated, a man says to his wife, "you killed our son" and she smirks and replies, "didn't God even kill Jesus?". Over and over we heard "Didn't God even kill Jesus?"

Well, the answer is no! He didn't kill Jesus. Sinful man did! Our text says, "**when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law**" God sent Jesus. He delivered Him to redeem the world, but God didn't kill Him. Listen to a portion of Peter's sermon from Acts 2.

22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— 23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; 24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it." (Acts 2:22-24)

God delivered Jesus according to His determined purpose and foreknowledge, in the fullness of time, to lawless hands – our lawless guilty hands for not having kept the law. The lawless Jewish hands crucified Jesus, but God raised Him from the dead. Again, listen to Jesus' words Himself in Mark 9:

Mark 9:31

For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day."

“Betrayed in the hands of men and they will kill Him”. For our sin, Jesus died by the hands of guilty mankind under the law. But God Himself raised Him from the dead having accomplished successfully our redemption!

So, Peter does not sadly say at Pentecost, “we can never bring back Jesus from the dead”. And this cannot be said about anyone who has received the adoption of sonship by faith in Jesus! For our loved ones who kept the faith in Jesus and died in 2022 or in years past, they are celebrating the victory where time is no longer counted! For the believer in Christ has full rights as a son or daughter of Christ.

“Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

Let those words bring in the New Year to your troubled hearts. Beloved in Christ, you are an heir of eternal life. Happy “no year” for years are no longer counted in heaven and life is eternal without the law, without sin, without the devil and in perfect joy.

When the fullness of time came to you personally in your baptism, you received full rights as a child of God, freed from sin, death and the devil! When the fullness of time came for the whole world, Jesus was born and Jesus redeemed the whole world from sin!

And then, God, according to His gracious will, in the fullness of time gave you personally this gift of freedom through faith by the power of the Holy Spirit! Your name was given to you at your baptism and known to God in the Book of Life!

“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!”

Yes! The Holy Spirit lives in your hearts! Yes! You can cry out to the Father not in shame but as dear daddy, Abba, for Jesus was born under the law and has removed the sting of death and the strength of sin which is the law.

“56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Thanks be to God that we have received this victory and we receive it anew as we eat and drink the very body and blood of Jesus to begin the New Year – redeemed

adopted sons and daughters of God – with full rights as heirs of eternal life. Happy New Year indeed – this year and always in Jesus! Amen

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)