

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Sunday School Christmas Service – December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008

### **Galatians 4:4-7**

**<sup>4</sup> But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. <sup>6</sup> Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.**

Dear Children God,

After today there will not be a whole lot of days until it is Christmas. There may be a few more presents, and a few more family or work gatherings. And as fast as Christmas comes, it seems to end just as quickly. When you figure out how much time you spent in the mall, or online, or in lines, or at parties, or putting up decorations and lights, it becomes very clear that we put a bunch of time and effort and money into Christmas. So as we come closer to the end of another Christmas season we may want to ask the question, "**So what?**" What is it all been about? How are things any different this year from any other year? **So what about Christmas?**

We know the answer. It is why we are here this morning. We know what makes Christmas a big deal. We know why we put in the effort and we understand what the celebrating is really all about. But just in case our memory is a little hazy, just in case we were a little busy and distracted the past few weeks, just in case we may be tired of Christmas and asking so what? Just in case, let's look at God's Word in Galatians 4:4-7 and find some answers to:

### **Theme: Christmas Is Here. So What?**

- 1. We are redeemed**
- 2. We are children of God**

To redeem means to buy back. We all needed to be bought back. We were all under the slavery of the law. All people are born under the law. That means you have to obey it. For God's Old Testament people this meant all of the law that God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai. For us New Testament people the law that we are born under is the law of the Bible for New Testament people, the law of our country and also the law that God has written on our hearts. We know what is right and what it wrong and we know that we are obligated to do what is right and not do what is wrong.

This is not just a tough burden. It doesn't just mean hard work, being under the law is an impossible situation. The Bible says clearly that all people have broken God's Law. Whether we are a Jew or a Gentile, whether we lived 2000 years ago or we live today. We are all guilty of breaking the law. The primary purpose of God's law is to show us this truth. Paul wrote in Romans 3:19, "**Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.**" Every mouth is silenced under the law when we see that we are all cursed with the consequences of our sin. We are held accountable for our sins when we see that we deserve the punishment of eternal death in hell. We need to be redeemed from the curse of the law.

Understanding our own helplessness and the terrifying situation we are in under the law helps to answer the question, **So what about Christmas. We have been redeemed.** Listen again beginning in verse 4, "**But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those under law.**" Our God is the God of history. At the perfect moment in history, he sent his one and only Son into this world. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. The eternal Son of God was born as a real person and born under the very law that he had established. Jesus submitted himself to the law that we could never keep.

He did not do this to show us the way we should live, or to give us an example to follow. Jesus put himself under the law to redeem us. Jesus obeyed that Law perfectly. He was tempted in every way that we are yet was without sin. He was as Peter described a lamb without spot or blemish. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice required by God to redeem all people from the curse of sin. Christmas is a big deal because we see the sinless Son of God coming to take the place of every last sinner ever born.

I have always been interested in watching magicians work. They do things that quite frankly seem impossible. There are some tricks that I'm sure that I will never figure. What I have figured out is that a good magician is good when he can get the audience to look at something that isn't important. Most good magicians have a beautiful assistant by their side. I think that the assistant is more important than we might think. How often don't we follow what the assistant is doing and don't pay enough attention to the magician who is doing the trick?

In a way I think that is what happens at Christmas time. Most people know that Christmas time is about Jesus and the celebration of his birth, but the Devil has brought in the "beautiful assistant" which is all the Christmas decorations, present buying, and parties which seems to get the attention of a lot of people, you and me included. But the problem with watching the "beautiful assistant" is that we miss the real point of Christmas. We miss the main focus. With all the busyness of this season, it can be easy to think, "**So what about Christmas?**" "I will be glad when it is over."

But you are here this morning at this point in time, not by accident, but you are here to be reminded or to hear that you have been redeemed. Christmas is about the beginning of God's plan to save you. Your Savior bought you back from your bondage to the law and all the guilt that comes from your sins. Your Savior bought you back from the fear of death. Even as a believer there is uncertainty that we may feel as we face death but there is no fear when we remember Jesus died and was punished so we will never be.

And your Savior bought you back from the power of the devil. He did this by facing every last temptation the devil could bring and never once sinned. Jesus defeated the devil by dying a perfect death to pay for all sin. Jesus then went to hell to announce his victory over the devil and all those who rejected him. Jesus then rose on Easter Sunday to prove to the world, and to each of us that we have indeed been redeemed. That is what Christmas and Easter for that matter are all about.

We usually fall into the "**So What About Christmas**" trap when we just see another busy time of the year, or we just view Christmas as a time to dress up the kids and see the lights. But when we remember that at the perfect time God sent Jesus to redeem us we know what Christmas is all about every year. And we also know that it has lasting results. Because Jesus redeemed us, **we are children of God.** At the end of verse 5, we hear that we were redeemed so "**that we might receive the full rights of sons.**" This is the big deal about Christmas. We are children of God.

This Christmas and Easter message of Jesus being born and dying and rising from the dead is what God used to work faith in our hearts. By his grace, because of Christmas, and its powerful message of forgiveness in Christ, we have been set apart from slavery to sin and adopted into the family of God. We have the full rights of sons. Using the word son does not indicate a male or female difference or preference, but in the culture of that day the first born son is the one who received all the inheritance. We are all first born sons. Through faith in Jesus we are children of God.

Listen again to the blessings we enjoy as children of God. "**Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."** <sup>7</sup> **So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.**" Christmas is all about our status as sons of God. That is what we are. There is a wonderful little word in verse 6. That word is "**are.**" He does not say you will be, or you might be, or you once were, or you sometimes are. You are sons of God. This was not because of a husband's will, or a human decision, or a natural birth, but we were born of God when he sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts to create faith.

No matter how far away we get from Christmas, or how distracted we may get, we have the Spirit of God living in us. Jesus made this promise to his disciples before he left them to ascend back to heaven and it stands for us. He does not leave us alone, but sends the Holy Spirit to us through the Word and the

sacraments. Christmas is all about our three in one God planning and accomplishing salvation for the world and for each of us and keeping us focused on his Word even when we are busy.

We have that promised Holy Spirit living in us. This is why we long to approach our Heavenly Father in Prayer. It is why during the busiest time of the year we take time and are drawn to church. As children of God we long to be with our God. And we see Christmas as a wonderful time to do just that. At Christmas we see the lengths that God went to in saving us. This love draws people to it.

There are always people in church on Christmas who may not have been in church for a while. That love of God in sending Jesus is a powerful attraction, even if people come for the wrong reason they still hear the Christmas Gospel. For people who are in church throughout the year there is a longing to be with our God and be reassured of what Christmas is all about. It is not an emotion, or a feeling, it is about our status. We are children of God because of the work of this child born in the manger and we long to hear about him again. So what about Christmas? Because of Jesus we are God's children and we have an inheritance in heaven.

Most people when they die leave behind some sort of inheritance. Many people get an inheritance, and some are quite large, but nothing compares with the inheritance we have a result of God sending us Jesus. Because of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is in our heart and is the deposit that guarantees our inheritance. In 1 Peter 1 that inheritance is described this way, **"In his mercy he has given us new birth, into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, kept in heaven for you."** So what about Christmas? You have a gift that lasts forever. One that will never wear out nor will it be taken away, you have the status of **Child of God!** This is your eternal inheritance.

One of the things that you hear quite often in the stores at this time of the year is a parent talking to their naughty child saying, if you don't start behaving I'm going to start taking back some of your Christmas presents. I doubt that the parents actually take away presents, but it seems to keep the kids in line at least until Christmas. Thank goodness that God doesn't ever tell us that he will take away Jesus, our best gift, because we have been naughty and sinful. God does not take Christ away from us even though we abuse him. Even though we are sinful from birth and sin every day and don't often times appreciate God's gift to us as much as we should, God has promised that the gift of his Son is ours forever. That doesn't mean we can do what we want. It means that our ever faithful God moves us to cherish the time we spend with him and our fellow believers. God's faithfulness answers the question of **"So what about Christmas."** We are children of God and heirs of heaven. That is what it is all about.

There are people who put up their Christmas lights very early. There are also those who leave them up for a long time. Maybe it bothers you one way or another when people get so into Christmas, when stores put out the Christmas stuff right after Halloween. Maybe that type of behavior leads people to say **so what**. But let's leave Christmas up for a while. Let's do that because we know what it is all about. It means God sent Jesus to redeem us and it means God has adopted us into his family. It is never too early, or too late to know that about Christmas and to celebrate what it is all about. Amen.