

“The Purpose of Christmas”

Galatians 4:4-5

Sermon for The First Sunday After Christmas 2021; December 26, 2021

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

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In the Gospel reading for today, there is a phrase that shows up three times. It is “according to the law.” First it is “according to the law of Moses” in verse 22 (Luke 2:22). Then it was “according to the custom of the law in verse 27 (Luke 2:27). Then it was “according to the law of the Lord” in verse 38 (Luke 2:38). And there it referred to having performed all the things according to the law of the Lord. Now the things that were done in this passage were done by Jesus’ mother and earthly father. By the way, I have referred to Joseph as Jesus’ earthly father because Joseph was father to Jesus in a unique way, since Jesus was conceived in a unique way, conceived by the Holy Spirit. But still, there is something important about Jesus that is being told to us here. It is that He came to fulfill the law. This is another wonderful thing about Christmas. This has to do with the reason why, the purpose, that God the Son became a human being and was born at Bethlehem.

The Apostle Paul talks about this in Galatians 4: “When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born from a woman, born under the law, so that He should redeem those who under the law, so that we should receive adoption as God’s children” (Gal. 4:4-5). The Apostle talks about people who need redemption in relation to God. This is all human beings, you and I included. We are “under the law.” We need to be redeemed being under the law so that we could receive adoption as children of God.

We need this redemption because in Romans 5 Paul says that death has spread to all human beings because all have sinned (Rom. 5:12). We have all sinned under the law. In Galatians 3, Paul says that Scripture has confined everyone under sin so that the promise of redemption would come to us by faith in Jesus (Gal. 3:22). Since all have sinned by nature we are not by nature children of God. So we need to be adopted by God. Jesus came to redeem us, to win this adoption for us.

How was He going to do that? Well, He identified with us in our situation before God. Every one of us is born from our mothers, born of woman in Paul’s language. So God the Son was born of woman, just like us. We were born under the law. So God the Son was born under the law.

This is quite remarkable. God the Father created all mothers through God the Son. God the Son has given the law. He is the author of the law. The law does not judge Him but it judges us.

Now He is born as a creature through His created mother. Now He is born under the law, subject to its judgment, even though He is the author of the law.

If Jesus were other than who He really is, this would not be good news. He would just be another human being born of his mother, born under the law. But since He is God the Son in human flesh appearing, this is really good news. A Man has come, born of woman, born under the law, who is innocent under that same law, because He is God the Son.

Paul says that He came to redeem us under the law. Redeem means to buy us back or get us back. We are indebted under the law. Jesus pays the price to cancel our indebtedness. We are lost to God not being His children under the law. Jesus redeems us being under the law so that He could get us back for God. What He did is the basis of our adoption.

But just how did He redeem us being under the law? He was obedient. We see the

beginnings of this in the Gospel reading. He carried it out perfectly throughout His life. He obeyed God's law perfectly being under the law. He fulfilled all of its requirements. But He kept God's law perfectly for our benefit. We call this Jesus' active righteousness.

He also gave His life to pay the price. Paul says He gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age. This was the will of God the Father (Gal. 1:4). Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse in our place. We need Him to do this because that law says that cursed is everyone who does not obey the law (Gal. 3:10). Jesus became this curse by allowing Himself to be hung on a tree, that is, nailed to that Roman cross. There He paid the price for our redemption and made satisfaction for our sins. There He redeemed us who are under the law, having Himself been born under the law. We call this Jesus' passive righteousness for us.

Let's say that you have gotten in trouble with the authorities. You have broken some legitimate law, and it is serious. You have been arrested. The police have investigated. They have amassed evidence. The prosecuting attorney has filed charges with the court. Trial has come. The evidence has been presented by the prosecution. It is overwhelmingly against you. It shows that you did it. There is no hiding, no denying, nothing you can do. Nothing you can do.

The jury returns a verdict of guilty. The judge sentences you to prison. You feel the panic as your freedom is taken from you, justly. You feel all the remorse of "oh how I wish I had not done that thing. How could I have been so stupid?"

You see the weakness and proneness in yourself, and you despise yourself. You are angry with the law and the judgment and the authority, but it does no good being angry. Your anger is unjustified, and it won't change your guiltiness and the judgment. You are guilty as charged. And the sentence is just. And that kind of anger just grows into a hatred that consumes the soul.

"Oh, if only there were some way to get out from under this so I could be free again and live." And if there were some way, what joy would come into your life and into your soul. And what resolution there would be to never do such a thing again. But what way out could there possibly be? You are stuck. The dye is cast. Your future and destiny is sealed. There is nothing that can be done.

There is a commotion at the back of the court. Someone has just come through the doors. He does not look so impressive, but He bears impressive titles. And yet, there is something about Him. He has some kind of uncanny authority.

He comes up to the podium to speak to the judge. He says to the judge: "I will stand in the place of this one who has violated the law and has been justly condemned. Sentence me. I will pay the price in his or her place. I will suffer the sentence his or her actions have deserved.

The judge says, "Hold on. This is not according to justice under the law. Are you some sort of scoundrel? What's your game?"

This person says "I know it is not according to justice under the law, but it is according to grace and I want to do it. I am not a scoundrel. I have kept the law. I am innocent and I am playing straight with the court."

So the judge says, okay. The person who has suddenly come in is sentenced, with your sentence. The judge turns to you and says, "You are free to go." Jesus turns to you and says, "Go now my friend in my forgiveness and live."

In deep humility, you go free. You say thank you, but this is not a shallow thank you. He has changed your life. You dedicate your life to Him, not by coercion, but out of deep gratefulness.

Or course, this kind of scenario does not happen in a court of law in civil society, and it

shouldn't. Those who think it should are making a huge and catastrophic confusion; catastrophic for civil society. This is no way for the civil authorities to maintain law and order, which is their job.

But with God it is a different matter, because there really is no way of escaping the judgment and that judgement is eternal, unless God were to do something quite different. This is exactly what God has done in sending His Son to be born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem us who are under the law, to adopt us as His own. This is what Jesus, God the Son in our flesh, has done, willingly, in love for you and me, undertaking the Father's mission.

So we see here the purpose of Christmas. God the Son was born of a woman, born under the law. He did that to redeem us who are under the law, so we can receive adoption as God's children. He was born that way. He has accomplished that redemption. Our adoption in His name has come for us to receive it, and we have received it. Truly Jesus is the Gift of all gifts. Thanks be to the God. Amen.