



# BEYOND THE MANGER

by Thomas  
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matter, so December 25 is fine. What we celebrate does matter. Galatians 4:4-7 tells us what the real celebration is all about.

“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba Father.’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir” (Galatians 4:4-7).

The Greek phrase translated “when the time had fully come,” bears further examination. It means when God saw conditions as fitting, the timing was just right to send his Son into the world. It is interesting to note that two factors graphically played into timing: Language and political structure.

At the time of Christ’s birth, there was one common, written language of trade, commerce and common use—the Greek language. The Mediterranean region—for the most part the known world at the time—was part of the Roman Empire. These two factors are significant because a common language and government allowed for the rapid spread of the gospel. The apostle Paul, a Roman citizen, was able to complete his missionary journeys because of the political structure. Persecuted Christians fled Jerusalem taking the gospel wherever they traveled. The common language allowed for the written communication of the gospel throughout the empire. Conditions were just right for God to send his Son.

## The Incarnation

The significance of verse four doesn’t end with world conditions, but more importantly, holds forth the incarnation. The term, “incarnation,” is used to describe what took place in Christ. God became man. Divinity took on humanity. Without ever ceasing to be God, Christ took on the

**A**s Christmas approaches, the world gives thought to the Son of God. In their thoughts, Christ is left in the manger. Unfortunately, that’s where he remains in the minds of many Christians as they rush through the season, caught up in gift giving and receiving. Driven by the advertising industry, they too, get caught up in the “Christmas spirit.” We honor an event that took place 2,000 years ago, but what are we really honoring?

## The Exact Day Of His Birth?

It’s unlikely Christ was born on December 25. That date was conveniently chosen by early church leaders to coincide with the pagan winter solstice festival already in place. Since the shepherds were still in the field, late October presents a more likely time for his birth. The exact day doesn’t

human nature (the “hypostatic union,” for those of you who like theological terms). The incarnation is

God becoming human for the purpose of saving humans from sin. Christ laid aside his rights as God to become our Redeemer (see Philippians 2:6-11).

Christ didn't come into existence at his birth in Bethlehem. Christ took on flesh with his birth. Over and over, the Bible affirms the pre-existence of Christ. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14).

The incarnation isn't presented only in the New Testament, but the Old as well. The prophet Micah, 700 years before the birth of Christ, said, “But you Bethlehem, Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times” [literally, from the days of eternity] (Micah 5:2). God's plan from eternity past was to send his Son to walk the earth as one of us.

In Galatians 4:4 we see both the pre-existence and divinity of Christ. We also see his humanity. In the English translation, “God sent his Son,” we may miss the full impact of what is being said. The Greek means “sent out from.” God sent his Son out from himself.

When world conditions were just right, God sent forth his Son. Not only was he “born of a woman,” he was “born under law.” Christ came to fulfill the requirements of the Law of Moses (which is only called the Law of Moses, it was really God's law). As God in the flesh, he fulfilled God's law, he took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. “Christ was born under law,” an amazing statement. The Law-giver was willingly subjected to the law, not only the law of Moses but the law of man, for it was the law of Rome that saw him crucified.

**God became man. Divinity took on humanity. Without ever ceasing to be God, Christ took on the human nature. The incarnation is God becoming human for the purpose of saving humans from sin. Christ laid aside his rights as God to become our Redeemer.**

Why did he do it? Verse five, “to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.” The word “redeem” means to buy back. The picture is of a slave on the auction block. The slave can't buy himself. His or her only hope is that someone will purchase him and set him free.

Christ came to buy us back from the slave-market of sin. He came to redeem those “under law.” The entire world is subject to God's moral law. All humanity stands guilty as lawbreakers—sold into the slave market of sin (read Romans chapter 1). We all stood guilty and condemned before God's moral law, with nothing to look forward to but God's righteous judgement. Christ came to redeem us—to extricate us from our helpless, hopeless condition.

Jesus Christ, who is God, left his heavenly abode to take on flesh, be subject to the law—fulfilling God's holy law, condemned to die under the law of man—all to pay a debt he didn't owe. He did it all to redeem us, to buy us back from the slave-market of sin. He did it to pay the penalty of sin—my sin and yours. That friends, is what Christmas is all about, and that calls for celebration.

### **We Are God's Children**

Christ fulfilled the Mosaic law, and being the unblemished sacrifice of God, became the perfect sin offering. His sacrifice opened the way for every human to have a personal relationship with God. The relationship is available to all who recognize Christ's sacrifice on their behalf.

The people who turn from sin to God through faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice, “receive full rights as sons.” We become the adopted children of God.

I believe the apostle Paul had the Roman laws of adoption in mind when he wrote this.

Under those laws, a father could never disinherit an adopted child. As adopted children, we have an inheritance. I believe heaven is our inheritance—eternity with God.

Those who are born again, who have appropriated Christ's sacrifice, have the Holy Spirit. “Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father’” (Galatians 4:6). The Holy Spirit comes to indwell every believer at conversion, baptizing them into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Spirit confirms that we are God's children.

The usage of “Abba, Father” here is significant. “Abba” is a transliteration of the Aramaic word for “Father.” Some have said it is the equivalent of “Daddy,” but it isn't that casual. There is a greater significance to it than saying we can call God “Daddy.” “Father” is merely a translation of the Greek. Aramaic was the language of Palestine, and the Greek would have been the language of others in the empire.

I believe the two words of “Abba, Father” used side-by-side point to the forming of one body of believers from both Jews and Gentiles. Usage of the terms indicates a removing of the wall of partition that separated Jews and Gentiles. Barriers of race are removed in Christ. Both Jew and Gentile can now call God “Father.”

If you have chosen Christ as Lord, you have the Holy Spirit and heaven is your inheritance, and that is reason for celebration. Christmas is God giving the greatest gift to buy your pardon and mine. That pardon depends upon your response. What are you celebrating this season? □

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