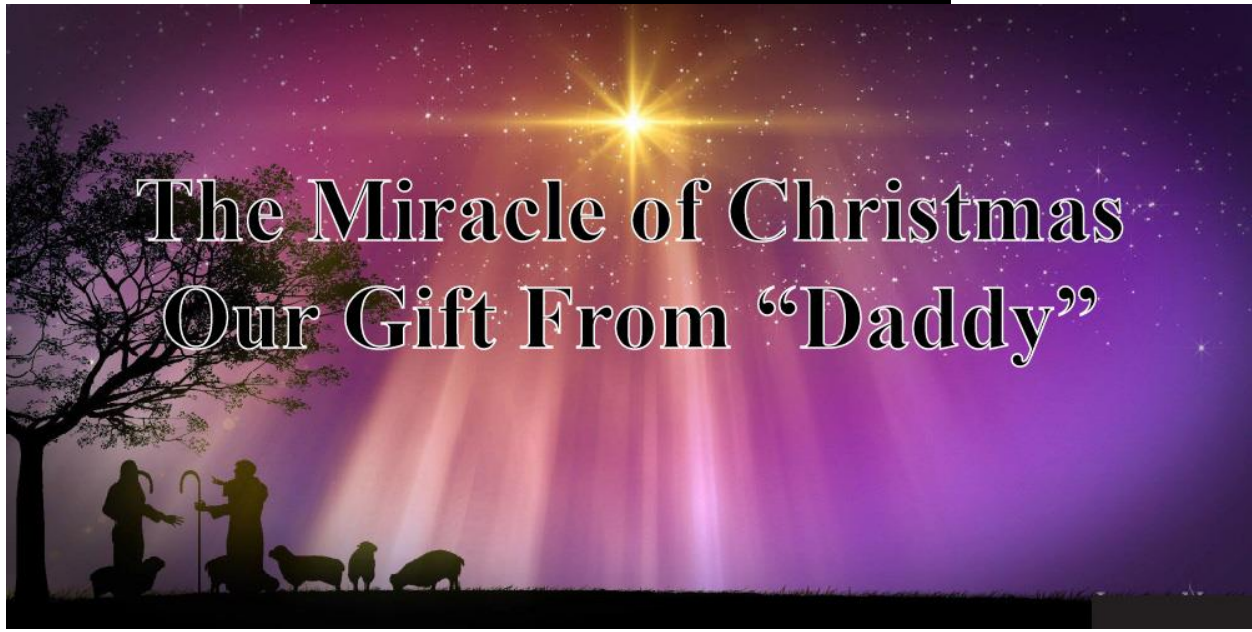


Ministry of Grace Church

Galatians 4:1-7 - Sermon Notes



Introduction

As amazing and special as the birth of a child is, particularly to a parent, it is not a miracle. It is a natural occurrence of life. However, the birth of Jesus **was** a miracle. And, it was made even more miraculous by the incredibly accurate predictions of it by several different prophets hundreds of years before it happened. These prophets told us when, where, and how this miracle would occur.

When

More than 600 years before the birth of Jesus, the angel Gabriel told Daniel when the Messiah would come. Here's how Daniel relayed it to us:

Seventy weeks have been determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Holy of Holies. "So you are to know and have insight that from the going out of a word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks (Daniel 9:24-25a)

He told Daniel the clock would start at the time of the command to rebuild Jerusalem and that the Messiah would arrive 69 weeks of years later. That command was given by the Persian king Artaxerxes in approximately 445 BC. The Jewish people of the time were aware that the "weeks" or "sevens" that Daniel spoke of were actually weeks, or sevens, of years. So, we can calculate that Daniel said that the Messiah would arrive around AD 30. As a result, at the time of Jesus' birth, the Jewish people knew that the Messiah was going to come in their lifetime.

In addition to knowing that the “weeks” were weeks of years, we need to consider that the Jewish calendar (which aligned with the Babylonian calendar) indicated that a year was 360 days long (12 months of 30 days each.) So, the length of time from the decree to the Messiah was 476 of our years. The other thing to take into account is that the year after 1 BC was not the year zero, but the year AD 1. See the accompanying charts for details.

Where

According to chapter 2 of Matthew’s gospel account, the Magi came to Jerusalem looking for the King of the Jews who they believed had just been born. Herod had no idea where this threat to his kingdom was born, so he consulted with the spiritual leaders of his day, and they quoted from the prophecy of Micah. This prophecy was written 700 years before Jesus’s birth.

But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from everlasting, From the ancient days. (Micah 5:2)

How

According to Isaiah, this is how the Messiah would come. This prophecy was also written 700 years before Jesus’s birth.

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

I heard the story of a Hebrew scholar who was raised speaking the Hebrew language. He knew the language well, both functionally and technically. He challenged a well-known Christian saying, “You do realize, don’t you, that the word translated virgin in Isaiah’s prophecy, is *alma*. This word does not mean ‘virgin,’ it simply means ‘a young girl.’ In fact, we have no word in Hebrew that means ‘virgin.’” The Christian replied, “Then what word would he have used to refer to a young virgin?” The Hebrew scholar thought for a minute and then replied, “I suppose the only word he could have used is *alma*.”

So – with incredible accuracy, six to seven centuries before His birth, the prophets predicted When, Where, and How the Jewish Messiah would come. That is miraculous, isn’t it? So, “What is the greatest miracle of Christmas?” Well, I don’t think it is any of these prophecies. I think the greatest miracle of Christmas is what Paul described in the book of Galatians, where it says:

Galatians 4:1-3

Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and stewards until the date set by the father. So also we, while we were children, were enslaved under the elemental things of the world.

Okay, okay, I can already tell what some of you are thinking, “Pastor, you have completely lost your marbles! These verses have absolutely nothing to do with Christmas!” Right? Well, maybe they do. Let’s look a little more carefully at these verses and the ones that follow.

Remember, the churches in Galatia were very hung-up on the Law. They believed that you had to be a Jew and keep the Law of Moses before you could become a Christian. They were living in the Roman Empire, where everything was done based on law, Roman law. And, by Roman law, only sons could inherit from their father. And – a son could only inherit after he had become an adult. And – he did not become an adult until the father said he was an adult. He was the one who set the age of inheritance. The father could even set different ages for different sons based on how well he felt they were growing and maturing.

Now consider this, until he reached the age set by the father, the son was no better than a slave. In fact, he was less than a slave because he was under the authority of slaves who determined his education and training. Paul informs us that before we came of age, we were slaves to the elemental things of the world. This expression, “the elemental things” is a reference to the ABC’s of life.

So – what are the ABC’s of life? They are these; “For every effect, there is a cause,” and “You get what you deserve.” The most universally held belief is that for every effect there is a cause. Every religious belief system has this as its basis, from the pagans to the secular humanists. They all believe that for every effect there is a cause - except for the “Big Bang.”

The corollary to this basic truth is that you get what you deserve. If you do good. then you deserve to have good things done to you. And, if you do bad then you deserve to have bad things done to you. For the Jews, these elemental things were further broken down into the Law of Moses. Now, let’s continue on with Paul’s writing to the Galatians.

Galatians 4:4-5

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

We have already looked at the “when” from man’s point of view. Now, let’s look at the “when” from God’s point of view. Paul refers to it as “the fullness of time.” It roughly means, “When the appointed time had come.” This is the time that God had determined was the precise time for this event to take place.

For all of you history buffs, remember that about 350 years before Christ’s birth, Alexander the Great had conquered the known world and spread his native tongue, Greek, throughout the conquered world. As a result, Greek became the *lingua franca*, that is, the common language for the entire world conquered by Alexander. Then, about 200 years later, Rome defeated Greece. In order to solidify their hold on the countries of the empire, the Romans built roads throughout the empire so that their armies could quickly get to any place they needed to put down any uprising. As a result, by the time of the birth of Christ, the world was accessible for trade and communications as it had never been before. Using these roads and the Greek language, the Romans created a postal system to carry communications throughout the empire. In the first century, news could spread from the capital city of Rome to anywhere in the empire in less than 2 months. Now, that may seem like an eternity in our world of instant messaging, but then it was as close to instantaneous as humanly possible.

So, now that the time was right, God sent forth his angels - not to deliver mankind, just to deliver the message of His coming. That is, the coming of God’s son. God knew that mankind was flawed because of Adam’s sin, and He knew that any child born of a man would inherit that sin. So – God caused His Son to be born of a woman, not of a man and a woman, just a woman. And not just any woman. A woman who was under the commandments and requirements of the Law. You see, in order to escape the condemnation of the Law, God’s Son had to live under the curse of the Law and do so perfectly. That’s the only way He could redeem mankind.

Redeem, that’s an interesting word. We have talked before about the use of Green Stamps in the mid twentieth century. These stamps could be used to purchase products from the Green Stamp Redemption Center. The normal Greek word translated “redeem” is *agoradzō*. It means, “to purchase in the market.” In fact, the marketplace in the first century was called the *agora*. In the

agora, a person could purchase almost anything from food, to clothing, to household goods, to tools and implements. You could even purchase slaves in the marketplace. And – there were two ways a slave could be purchased in the *agora*. A slave could be purchased individually or as a group of slaves. The buyer could then turn around and put a slave up for purchase again. Or – he could purchase a slave and remove him or her from the marketplace. This type of slave purchase was referred to as *exagoradzō*.

When we were redeemed, according to Paul in this letter to the Galatians, we were purchased and taken out of the marketplace (*exagoradzō*). But God didn't stop there. You see, a slave had no familial rights. He or she was not a member of the family. A slave was simply property of the family. But, if the father of the family was particularly fond of a male slave, he could formally adopt the slave as his son. A female slave could not be adopted. And, once a male slave was adopted, he could not be disowned or disinherited under any circumstance, so he was guaranteed to receive an inheritance from the father.

So, given that background, let's see what Paul is telling us in this letter to the Galatian Christians. Before God stepped-in, we were slaves to sin and were not free to do as we pleased. God then purchased us (redeemed us) and removed us from the marketplace, never to be sold again. Then – He adopted us as His sons, giving us full familial rights which can never be taken away, guaranteeing that we will receive an inheritance. But – God did not stop there. There's even more! Something that only Christians have. Old Testament saints like Job, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob didn't have it. Even Moses didn't have it. It's the thing that makes Christians unique in all of creation.

Galatians 4:6-7

And because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

Do you see that? As His sons, God indwelt us with His Spirit. Yes, the Holy Spirit lives inside every single Christian. The Jews were not indwelt by the Spirit. He came upon some of them, but He didn't indwell them. The Tribulation saints won't be indwelt, the millennial saints won't be indwelt. Only Christians are indwelt with the Holy Spirit! And, because of this, we can call out to God, not just as our Father, but as our Abba! The word *Abba* is an Aramaic word that is only used in the intimacy of the family circle. It is the expression of a small child upon seeing his father after a long absence. In joy, the child cries out, “Daddy!”

So What?

Since we are no longer slaves to sin, but intimate members of the family of Almighty God, the God of all creation. We are purchased with the blood of His Son – never to be sold again, and adopted - never to be disinherited, and - indwelt by His Spirit – therefore, we have all the riches of grace and love that any child could ever have.

So, you see, the greatest miracle of Christmas is His gift to us. In the fullness of time, sending His Son, our Father, the Creator of heaven and earth did **everything** for us. Everything that we needed to be able to stand in His presence – in Peace – Forever! Can you say Hallelujah?

Let's pray.