

## A Reflection on the Christmas Story Galatians 4:4-7

Galatians 4:4-7, a paraphrase...

*When the clock had run down and the time was right, God sent a rescuer, God's own Son; born to a woman in the usual way, growing up under the thumb of the law, just like the rest of God's chosen people. God sent him into such circumstances so that he could get everyone else out of them; paying the price of our freedom and giving us the opportunity to be adopted into God's family.*

*Because you are now God's children, the Spirit of God's child, Jesus, has been sent into your hearts; the Spirit who makes us as eager for God as children running into their parents' arms crying, "Daddy! Mommy!" So you are no longer at the beck and call of those things which once dictated your every move; now you are God's own children, and as God's children, you will receive from God all that has been kept in trust for God's children.*

Paul's letter to the Galatians is not a part of the Bible that the present, popular Christian imagination currently associates with Christmas. But, if you want a brief summary of the message of the incarnation, these verses probably are as good as you might hope to find. These verses reflect the nature of the incarnation and give us some clues as to what it meant to God and what it means for us.

Now, let's stop for a moment to take in the extraordinary claim of the incarnation...that through the mighty act of the Spirit and the willingness of Mary, God took on the form of a human and came to live among us. Once we come to grips with this we immediately see that the grandest miracle of the Christmas story is not that a virgin became pregnant, but that God became incarnate.



When God becomes a human being...becomes incarnate...God has now voluntarily become exposed to the same fears, risks, and dangers that face the rest of us. In birth God has become vulnerable to the risks of a fatal complication. In childhood God is vulnerable to the risks of accidents or growing up in poverty, suffering from childhood diseases, and being a victim of child abuse. Throughout life God is now exposed to violence, humiliation, oppression, the fear of war, and the prospect of a global pandemic. Now, the human/divine God in Jesus is exposed to the risk of being misunderstood, being rejected, being betrayed, being falsely accused...being condemned to death.

That the creator of the universe would submit to that is utterly amazing and it brings up the question, "Why?". And, Paul addresses that question. Paul says that God sent his Son into that situation so that Jesus could get all the rest of us out of it. Paul wants to make it simple for us so he puts this in family terms. Paul says that the Son did what he did in order that we might take this opportunity to be adopted into God's family.

What we have here is the most extraordinary exchange of gifts. We give Jesus our humanity and he accepts it and offers us his divinity in exchange. He becomes a child of human beings in order that we might become children of God. He becomes what we are so that we might become what he has always been. Paul spells it out. Because you are now God's children the Spirit of God's child...Jesus...has taken up residence in your heart.

Paul says that this miracle of the incarnation changes everything because as God's children, we no longer have to slavishly do whatever the world around us insists upon. We no longer have to become isolationists when society teaches the fear of the outsider. We no longer have to compulsively consume when society tells us that our value is tied to how we have accumulated possessions. We no longer have to conform to the impossible images of youth, beauty, and success that are constantly bombarding us. All is different now because we have become children of God and as God's children we will receive from God all that has been kept in trust for God's children.

Jesus was born under all these same pressures and constraints, just the same as we were. But, he came into such a life so that we might find a way out. When God became incarnate in Jesus, God put himself in our hands, at our mercy, so that we could put ourselves into God's hands and receive God's mercy.