

In the Fullness of Time

During the past Christmas season, as I was considering the wonder of the incarnation, my attention was captured by a statement regarding the advent of Jesus Christ from the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Galatia. "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." (Galatians 4:4,5)

Much could be said regarding this profound insight into the momentous event of Christ coming to earth. There's a great deal of scholarly discussion about what was in Paul's mind when he spoke of "the fullness of time". A commonly held idea is that Christ could hardly have come at a more opportune time in human history. Numbers of factors have been spoken of: the Pax Romana, bringing political stability and allowing free travel practically anywhere in the vast empire by ship or over the amazing system of Roman roads; the waning influence of the ancient gods and goddesses; a common language in Koine Greek; the inroads that Jews had made in spreading the idea of One God and a lofty morality.

Those factors (and others beside) most certainly paved the way for the swift spread of the Christian faith. I doubt, however, that these were behind the Apostle Paul's assertion that the Son of God came to earth "in the fullness of time." Paul (Saul), after all, was born and raised as a Jew, so his conception of decisive moments in history would have been more influenced by the great events of Jewish history, such as the Flood, the call of Abraham, the Exodus from Egypt, the reigns of King David and his son, King Solomon. Paul's heart would have been stirred by the Hebrew prophets, who strained forward, anticipating a time when a great deliverer, a greater son of King David would arise on the stage of history. As a Christian, the Apostle Paul grasped at a deep level how the

words of the prophets and even the events of Old Testament history were all foreshadowing the coming of the Son of God to earth.

I think that Paul, raised as a Jew, would have been wary of speculating why God chose this precise moment in history to come in human flesh. In God's wisdom, it was the most opportune time to initiate His great rescue mission, which was foretold throughout the Old Testament. One of the most striking features of the Old Testament (as we are reminded by the genealogies of Jesus in the New Testament) is God's propensity for surprises in selecting those who would form the family tree leading to the human family that would nurture Jesus Christ. Consider the prominent position of a prostitute (Rahab) and a Moabite foreigner (Ruth) in Jesus' lineage. God's choice of a poor peasant girl to be the mother of the Son of God was just one more example of God's habit (annoying to some) of choosing those whom the world despises to further His grand purposes.

We may be uncertain about God's timing of Christ's coming to earth but we can be sure of the purpose for His coming. He came to redeem men and women from the universal curse of the law. While mercilessly revealing our inability to please God, the law confers no power to obey God. In order to secure those blessings Jesus Christ would have to die some 33 years later on a Roman cross where, though totally innocent, He bore the law's curse. He rose from the dead so that countless men and women, trusting in the Son of God, might be adopted as God's sons and daughters and experience God's blessing forever. If you have entrusted your life to Jesus by faith, I encourage you to revel in the reality of adoption, even if your life has been marked by difficulties and sorrow. If you have never embraced Jesus Christ by faith, know that He stands ready to redeem you from the curse of the law and grant you the right to become a child of God, all because Jesus Christ willingly came to earth "in the fullness of time."