

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in Saint Paul's epistle to the Christians in Galatia the fourth chapter beginning at the first verse:

Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, ² but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. ³ Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" ⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Heavenly Father, sanctify us by the truth, Your word is truth. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

Today is either the fifth or the fourth day of Christmas depending on whose counting you are using. You see, the Twelve Days of Christmas coincide with the twelve days after Christmas Day which take us right up to... Epiphany. From the day of His birth until the coming of the Wise Men, according to the church year, there are twelve days which mark this time. So today we are celebrating the fourth or the fifth day of Christmas. I say "or" because you can start numbering on Christmas Day and end on January 5 or you can start on the 26th of December and end on January 6th. But regardless of numbering, we are currently in the twelve days of Christmas.

No, it has nothing to do with the song, so we will not break out into singing the Twelve Days of Christmas from the tops of our lungs; rather, the twelve days used to be days in which Christians would go to church, daily, until

Epiphany came. They would come to church and celebrate the birth of their Savior for 12-13 straight days... and while we do not come to church for those 12-13 days straight, how are we doing at celebrating the birth of our Savior? Were you done the night of Christmas? Have you, like I always try to convince my wife to do, begun taking down your Christmas decorations and tree?

We are always so quick to move beyond Christmas that even on Christmas Eve one of my friends noted how they needed something last minute for Christmas from a store... and they were already preparing for Valentine's Day. However, dear friends, maybe we can take a lesson from the Twelve Days of Christmas and really come to appreciate this time of year, the time when we celebrate the coming of our Savior into the world, the time we celebrate the Incarnation of our God, the time we worship the Christ child as He lay in the manger. And yet, no matter how many of the Twelve Days we keep up on, let us always remember that because of that little baby, because of the God-man born for us... we are *heirs of God*.

You see, if you're a good Roman Catholic or pretty historical, each of the twelve days of Christmas has a feast associated with a saint. One of the days is St. Stephen's Day... and from it we have the song about Old King Wenceslas. However, if you take a more abstract thinking about the twelve days you may be like those who have decided that each of the twelve days in the song deal with some sort of biblical truth. For example the partridge in the pear tree is Jesus, the two turtledoves are the Old and New Testaments, the 11 drummers drumming are the 11 faithful apostles which, thus, does not include Judas and so on.

And yet, regardless of how we decide to look at the song or the twelve days, we can know that the twelve days of Christmas are those days that span from the incarnation of the God-man to the visitation by the magi as we celebrate it.

As our text tells us, "When the fullness of time had come," yes when God decided that enough had gone on in His creation, when God decided it was now time to send forth His Savior, when

God decided the fullness of time had come He sent forth His Son. And yet, when the fullness of time had come we were still locked in the bondage of the elements.

God describes it like this, that before God sent His Son, before His Son reigned in our hearts, before we knew our Savior, we were at the mercy of the elements of the world. Before God had given us faith and salvation, we were under the control of satan and an eternity in hell. Before God had mercy on us, we were on our way to be eternally separated from Him. And none of us can deny this fact.

Before God opened our heart and mind, we were on the path to racking up the largest number of sin points imaginable. How many of us as children did not see what we could get away with when our parents were not looking? How many of us did not pit one parent against another to see which of them would give us what we wanted? How many of us did not spend Christmas after Christmas, birthday after birthday, Easter after Easter, upset and angry because of the lack of gifts that we had

received? Right there we see that the sins of dishonesty/lying, cheating/scheming, and anger/envy/greed are all coming to the forefront within each and every one of us.

And was this not only true when we were children... but also when we grew up to be adults, only we did it a little differently. As adults, instead of pitting parents against each other, now we pit one boss against another, or one friend against another. Instead of trying to pull one over on the parents, now we are trying to pull one over on our spouse or on our pastor. Instead of whining about the presents we get for holidays, now we... well we still can whine about the presents we get, but maybe now we're a little more passive-aggressive about it. "No, no, it's okay..." when really inside you are angry at the lack of attention that is being lavished your way on YOUR special day.

You see, that little child who is controlled by the elements, by the law, never really goes away. Though we may try to control it to be more socially accepted, we know that the little

child inside of each and every one of us is just dying to get out at times.

And yet, in the fullness of time, when the time had come, when God knew that we needed Him most, when God knew that a Savior was needed and that His message would get disseminated, then God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.

God the Father sent Jesus Christ as the one and only begotten Son to be the Savior of all mankind. He sent Jesus to come into this world, to live under the law just as we must, to live a life of pain and anguish, to live a life of scorn and derision, to live a life that was perfect. He perfectly fulfilled the law of God, which we could not. He then hung on a cross to bear the punishment of all of our sins. And He died. He died and was buried in a tomb. Three days later Jesus Christ rose from the dead to proclaim His victory over death, hell, and sin. Jesus rose to proclaim that His life and death were sufficient for all men of all time. He rose so that through faith we might know that His life and death was payment for all of our sin.

Jesus Christ came into this world to be our perfect substitute. He came into this world to live and die for us. He came into this world to set us free. Though we had spent our lives under the control and dominion of the elements, through faith in all that Jesus Christ has done for us, we are now free. We are no longer slaves to the elements and the law. We are no longer children and under the rule of the law. Now we are God's children and we are under the Gospel. Though the law is still present in our lives everyday, we are now ruled by the Gospel. When we do something, anything, we should be doing it by the motivation of the Gospel.

I celebrate Christmas, not because if I don't God will smite me, but because my Savior was born to begin His holy mission of saving me from all of my sins. I come to church, not because if I don't God will be mad at me and I can't go to heaven, I come to church because Christ has asked me to continue to meet together, to hear His holy word, and to receive the forgiveness of sins that His body and blood offers to me. I give to the church, not to

guarantee a better spot in heaven, but because Jesus lived and died for me and I want the entire world to know this message. We do things, not because of a law motivation (as we may have done as children), but we do them because of the gospel motivation (because Jesus lived, died, and rose for us and we want everyone to know this).

Dear friends in Christ, as we continue in the twelve days of Christmas, we do not celebrate them to make sure that God is happy with us and will bless us... no we celebrate the birth of Christ continually because Jesus was born for us. He was born so that He might die for all of our sins. He was born, in the fullness of time, to make us all the children of God... and if we are children, then, as Paul tells us, we are heirs. And through faith in His Son, we are all now heirs of God!

Thanks be to God that He has sent His Son for us. Thanks be to God that we now have salvation through all that Jesus Christ has done. And thanks be to God that we are now heirs of God through faith in Jesus Christ our Savior.

Thanks be to God. Amen.