

In Nomine Iesu

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LORD God, gracious Father, who in the fullness of time sent Your Son to assume our flesh and become our Brother, we thank You for Your truth and fatherly goodness in giving us this Savior, by whose birth we are delivered from sin, death, Satan, and hell; and we humbly ask You, keep us until the end in true knowledge of our Redeemer, that, with all the holy angels, we may rejoice at His nativity and behold Him, together with You and the Holy Spirit, in glory and majesty, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 57)

Galatians 4:4-5 – 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. ^(ESV)

I. But when the fullness of time had come,

Adam and Eve knew this time would come. Their son Seth and his son Enosh knew. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew. David knew. And the lowly virgin Mary knew. They knew that God would send a Savior for them, One who would crush the head of Satan and undo the curse of sin (Gen. 3:15). But when would the Savior come? Thousands of years had passed since God first promised a Savior. When would the promise be fulfilled?

The apostle Paul answers: it was *“when the fullness of time had come.”* Just as we cannot predict when our Lord will return again in glory, we could not have predicted when He would come in the flesh. The people of Israel were to expect the fulfillment of God’s promise at any time, just as we are to expect His promised return at any time.

God always knows the best time. There is nothing hidden from Him. He sees everything in the past and in the future as though it were happening in the present. He knew when the time was right to carry out His promised plan. All the prophecies of the Old Testament, inspired by the Holy Spirit, pointed to this time.

Now was the time for a prophet like Moses to rise up (Deu. 18:15). Now was the time for the virgin to conceive and bear a Son who would be called “Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). Now was the time for a Shoot to grow from the stump of Jesse (Isa. 11:1), a righteous Branch from the royal line of David (Jer. 23:5). Now little Bethlehem would be back on the map (Mic. 5:2). Now was the time for shepherds to see the night sky light up with the glory of the Lord and hear the history-altering words of those herald angels.

Hymn: #125.1-2 – “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”

II. God sent forth His Son,

"God sent forth His Son." They are simple words, but who can truly appreciate their meaning? We might expect the righteous God to send His eternal Son to condemn this broken, sinful world. Isn't that what we would do? If you handed the keys to a brand new car to a friend and said, "I trust that you will take good care of it." And your friend drives around recklessly damaging everything in his path and then crashes your car and destroys it, you would be very angry. You would want justice and repayment.

And what if your friend tried to put the blame on you? "Well, it's not like it was a very nice car. You could have done a lot better. If you had made a better plan, none of this would have happened!" That's what Adam and Eve did; they tried to put the blame on God and each other. And we keep on doing the same thing. Each one of us has broken God's Law more than we know, and yet we still find it easy to blame God and one another for our troubles.

How should God respond to such wickedness? He responded not with anger but with grace. *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him"* (Joh. 3:16-17). That is good news – glad tidings of great joy.

Hymn: #123.1-4, 13 – "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come"

III. born of woman,

Human beings have done some great and mighty things. People have climbed the highest mountains and explored the oceans' depths. They have built impressive structures and developed life-changing technologies. But no one with their accomplishments or inventions – no matter how great – can hold a candle to what Mary did.

Mary of Nazareth would have never been described as someone who was "going places." She did not strive for or expect to be a "somebody." She wanted to marry a poor craftsman, set up a warm home, and hopefully be blessed with children. All that changed when the angel Gabriel suddenly appeared saying, *"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"* (Luk. 1:28). The angel explained that Mary had found favor with God, which tells us that she believed the promises of God's Word.

The angel told her that she would conceive and bear a Son, whom she was to name Jesus. He would ascend the throne of His ancestor David and reign over an everlasting kingdom (vv. 31-33). "But how could a virgin bear a child?" Mary wondered. The angel said, *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God"* (v. 35). That's what made Mary so great – she was chosen by God to carry and care for the incarnate Son of God, the holy Christ-Child, who came to bring peace on earth to men.

Hymn: #113.1-2 – "A Great and Mighty Wonder"

IV. born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law,

For us, the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem has a warmth to it. We put nativity scenes in our homes that make it seem like Jesus couldn't have been born under more favorable conditions. But we must remember why this sweet baby was here. The eternal Son of God had taken on flesh, so that He might do everything for us that we had failed to do.

He was *"born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law."* By becoming a man, He made Himself obligated to His own holy Law. He had to live up to every rule and regulation of God, not only in His actions and words but also in His thoughts. And that is what He did. At every stage of His life—infant, toddler, child, teenager, adult—He perfectly adhered to the Law of God. He did not have anything to gain from it personally, since He was already perfect from eternity. But you and I had everything to gain by it.

No human being had ever kept the Law of God. All of us had fallen far short of God's requirements. So the perfect, unreachable standard of God's Law cursed us and condemned us. It told us that we had sinned against the holy God and must face His wrath. Except that God Himself intervened. He couldn't undo the Law—His Law is perfect, and He is neither capable of nor interested in imperfection. But He could send His Son to take our place and fulfill the Law for us.

That is why God's holy Son was here. He was here to redeem our sinful lives by His perfect life. He was here to pour out His holy blood on the cross to satisfy the righteous wrath of God. He came down from His exalted throne for no other reason than to save our fallen race.

Hymn: #127.1-2, 5-6 - "I Am So Glad When Christmas Comes"

V. so that we might receive adoption as sons.

A child who is adopted does not do anything to get adopted. He is chosen by others to be their child, live in their home, and receive their care. That is how it is with us and God. We did not choose Him; He chose us. We do not go to Him; He comes to us.

Like an orphan, you may feel as though you hardly matter to anyone. You might wonder if anyone really cares about you. You might think to yourself that everyone would be better off if you were gone. But that is not what God thinks. He created you and formed you in your mother's womb with a care that would make even the most skilled craftsmen bow their heads in awe.

Not only that, but God sent His only Son for you, to suffer and die for you, so that you would have eternal life. He brought you to the waters of Baptism, so that you could learn how much He cares for you. He claimed you through those waters. He adopted you as His own child and put His name on you. He said to you that day, and He says it every day since then, "All that I have is yours. My holiness is yours. My life is yours. My kingdom is yours."

Everything Jesus obtained for you by His perfect life, His innocent death, and His victorious resurrection has been given to you by your merciful Father in heaven. Jesus became your Brother in the flesh, so you would inherit everything that is His. He became a lowly Servant, so you would become an honored lord.

Hymn: #148.1, 6-8 - "Praise God the Lord, Ye Sons of Men"

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