

*But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. (Gal 4:4-7 NIV)*

Dear friends of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ + Happy Christmas to you + and may the peace of our God and saviour be with you now and always +

At last the time has come. Everybody is home. Shop is closed, business is done and its holidays at last. We are celebrating Christmas together with all humanity. This big church festival is celebrated all over the world – by rich and poor, old and young. Even pagans and heathens join us in these celebration although they don't believe what it's really about. Well, we know, don't we? We know that these celebrations join all in heaven and earth, because he, who came on Christmas is the king of all the heavens too. So we're part of a universal party as we gather and sing with all the cosmos: "*All glory be to God on high and thanks for all his favour...*"

These festivities go right back to the climax in history, when God determined the time is ripe, the time has finally arrived: "The time has fully come!" The years of waiting are over – centuries and millennia of it – it's all history now. Now is the time, now things are never going to be the same again. God has fulfilled his promise to his people of old. The prophecies from the very beginning have come about. The one, that was to come to save, redeem, heal and bring back home God's children has arrived. This is the watershed of history – the true Rubicon. From this time everything is to be looked at from the perspective of either before or after this crucial event in history, when God's son was born of the virgin Mary – there in Bethlehem. The angels sang: "*Jesus Christ is born today!*" The shepherds proclaimed: "*The promised Messiah has come!*" The faithful Simeon praised God in the temple: "*God has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.*" (cf. Lk.1,68-79)

Throughout history the living God had kept the hope alive, that he would send the one, who would crush the serpents head, who would lead his people to green

pastures and watch over them in peace and keep up good governance even as they were lying by the quiet waters. He had gone to great trouble to keep this faith going amongst his people on earth. That's why he had gifted the nations with faithful men and women throughout the ages – like Noah, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel. Faithful people like Joseph, Job, Jonah and Daniel. Big and small prophets like Moses, Isaiah, Micah right down to Zechariah. Priests, judges, kings and even farmers like Aaron, Samson, David and Amos. All of them pointers to the one, who would come and fulfil the godly promise, that God had not forgotten his people, but that he would come to forgive, to redeem, to liberate, heal and sanctify them once for all - making up for the past evils with lasting deliverance, salvation and flourishing peace and righteousness.

It was tough to keep this hope going through the ages – after the deluge, in Egypt's harsh slavery, during the long march through the desert, in hardship and struggles due to drought, famine, war's and persecutions. All these tough times put pressure on the hope that God would change things for the better by eventually sending the Messiah, the deliverer, the saviour and helper, the true physician and good shepherd of his people. This living and true hope was put under severest threat, when the people started looking for help elsewhere and no longer with the triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit! Instead of expecting help from him in their daily business, family life and that of their community – they started to look at idols and foreign ideas, powers and influences. They started to follow heathen practices, pagan rituals and sacrifices. Believing that if they would follow these strange and foreign ways, they would have life – blessed, holy and eternal. However that was a damned illusion, godless and futile. This was detrimental to the true faith and living hope amongst God's people in Israel. They left God's ways of wholesome life and doing things his way – holy and sanctified by his law and will. Still the bad new ways had become the normal state of affairs amongst the people of Adam since they had first doubted God's goodness and fallen into disbelief and mistrust by following the satanic temptation of breaking the good relationship with God and putting their faith into the novel ways: "Doing it my way!" – and not God's way. This change of affairs had not brought about divine deliverance as the devil had promised, but rather

dumped people into dreadful slavery. They were not free as the devil had insinuated, but rather captives and under the law and rule of sin, death and devil. They were now slavishly bound and tied to disobedience, godlessness and all sorts of evil sinfulness. Thus they had lost the rights of being God's free children. They had lost the godly citizenship of liberty and freedom in paradise. They were no longer heirs of heaven. They had been expelled from the godly garden and celestial life in God's good and gracious presence. Now they were but prisoners of sin, suffering the hardships of exile and being far away from their true godly home – and therefore plagued forever with a deep homesickness and yearning for salvation. Restless and on the move! That was their sorry lot now – and all because of our own fault, our own most grievous fault. It was the consequence of God's original curse: *"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."* (Gen 3:17-19 NIV)

But since those very early days, God had graciously kept up the hope of deliverance also. That was his wonderful plan from the very start of this human history even though that was not to be expected at all. Death had been our rightful inheritance, but God had rather given us hope of life out of misery and death. Mercifully he had opened up the route to forgiveness and had graciously granted the perspective of a new life with him – even though the law was against us and our sin had cancelled our right to demand this. God found a new and original way to fulfil the very letter of the law to the very last one through his only begotten son Jesus Christ and by his vicarious sacrifice. He is the one, who fulfilled the demands of the divine law meticulously and most scrupulously when the time was ripe and enough waiting had been done. Jesus left out nothing to be desired by God's perfect will. He did everything just right and absolutely pleasing to God. Starting off from the very beginning in Bethlehem until all was done, fulfilled satisfactorily on the cross of Golgotha. Yes, he fulfilled all divine demands and lived flawlessly according to God's will and obeyed the most holy law from beginning to end in thought, word and deed.

On the eighth day – as little baby – Jesus was presented in the temple and circumcised. That’s when his blood was shed for the first time. Innocently he poured out his blood for you and your salvation. His most precious blood – godly, divine, without blemish or fault – not spoilt by sinful lust or desire, no evil drop or particle – just pure and holy. This he shed for you. Spilt and poured out for you and for the forgiveness of all your sin. That he did to redeem you from all your guilt. That’s how he paid the ransom for you and all the world vicariously. Now you are no longer foreigners or aliens, never mind slaves, but rather sons of God and heirs of the heavenly kingdom forever and ever. Not just friends, but true family and therefore we can call upon him in every need and all life’s situations: “*Abba, dear father hear our prayer!*” And he has promised to answer us even before we pray and that over and above what we ask for: *What a privilege for us to carry all our needs to God in prayer!*

Oh yes – Christmas is a wonderful holiday. It gives us time and opportunity to celebrate God’s deliverance of his people through Jesus Christ our Lord. We worship and praise him for that and we pray that he will keep us in the true faith now and always. May he keep us from loosing faith and looking for help elsewhere. Rather let him keep our ears and hearts focused on his dear son Jesus Christ as our true Lord and saviour through the workings of his Holy Spirit – that we follow his ways of living in faithful obedience to his most holy will and trusting his gracious promises now and always. Amen.

*"All this for us our God has done granting love through his own son. Therefore, all Christendom, rejoice and sing his praise with endless voice. Alleluia!"* (M.Luther tr. F.S. Janzow LSB 382,7)